

The IDEAS  
of a PLAIN  
COUNTRY  
WOMAN

The Country Contributor

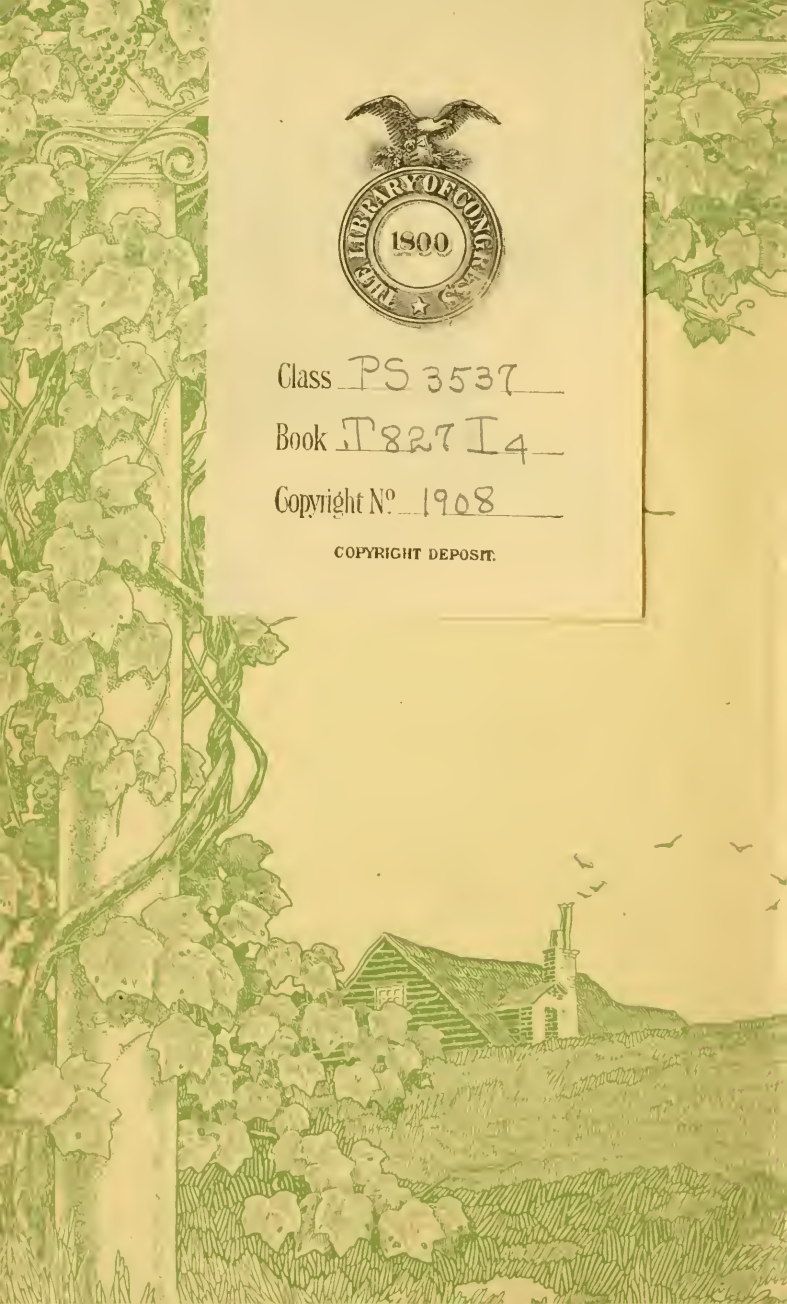


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## The Ideas of a Plain Country Woman



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By  
"The Country Contributor"

*Juliet V. Estrous.*



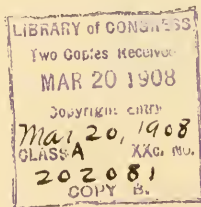
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## INTRODUCING "A PLAIN COUNTRY WOMAN"

Five years ago an article appeared in the *Indianapolis News*, under the signature of "A Country Contributor." Although the article was made part of a paper of many pages, it immediately "found itself" with the readers — principally the women readers. The writer was asked to continue, and for all these years there has appeared in the *Indianapolis* paper the weekly views of "The Country Contributor."

It was this work to which my attention was called, and I invited the author to contribute to the *Ladies Home Journal*. This was three years ago, and I have no hesitation in saying that her contributions have been more widely read and are to-day more popular than the writings of any single contributor to the magazine.

It is difficult to analyse the peculiar

## Ideas of a Plain Country Woman

charm that the writings of "The Plain Country Woman" have for a wide public unless it is that the author has lived deeply and touches upon the vital well-springs of living with a hand that we feel is that of experience. As the author herself says of her writings: "I know all its shortcomings; I know it is disjointed; I know it lacks continuity — but it's me." But it is also true that people by the millions have read and are to-day, each week and each month, reading the writings of "The Plain Country Woman," irrelevant as it may be in her eyes and in their eyes, and they have read with pleasure and with profit.

And it is with the hope that her views dealing with those phases of life that she believes to be "woman's best estate" may find new and approving readers, that this, the author's first book, is presented to the public.

EDWARD BOK.

Philadelphia, 1908.

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## The Ideas of a Plain Country Woman



# THE IDEAS OF A PLAIN COUNTRY WOMAN

## I

### THE COPY BOOK

WHEN I was a child the copy book was my horror. The period for writing was one of the most mortifying of the entire day. To be sure it was not so bad as the first half hour after devotional exercises, when I was obliged to stand up at "the board" and demonstrate to the entire school that I was a "dummy" in mathematics. I can still feel the hot flush on my cheekbones — all of our family had abnormally high cheekbones and were inclined to have them emphasised by red spots which contrasted unpleasantly with our blue eyes and "sandy" hair. As I say, I can still feel the burning of the hot, red spots as I stood trying to "cipher," to cheat, to get

the "answer" by fair means or foul, before the teacher turned his basilisk eye on me and discovered that I was in a miserable muddle as usual. The copy book could be concealed at least from part of my school-mates but, no matter how I tried, by flattening my hand over the page and sitting awkwardly out of "position" until goaded back by the teacher, I never could get through the "writing" period without suffering agony from the supercilious glances of the girls, who sat near, and who made beautiful, clear pages, slanting and shading their letters exactly right, or without the mean, red-headed boy, who was the bane of my life, craning his neck across the aisle and exclaiming in a stage whisper: "Lordy, what hen-scratchin'!"

It always seemed to me when I turned a new page that I was going to do better. We are a hopeful race — and each new day brings us the stimulus of opportunity — so with all the ugly letters behind me I used to begin on a new page with a sort of presentiment that some miracle had been performed overnight and that now I could surely write like Laura or Clara or Kate.

I think I know now why I could n't. I was not naturally imitative. This is the reason why I cannot do fancy work or flower painting or hang my curtains nicely or fix little pictures in passe-partout, or write a club paper on Italy, or, in fact, do anything "like other people."

I have lived to be glad of this. There is no use in everybody being so hopelessly alike, and much evil arises from unquestioningly following the copy set by people who are supposed to be "smart." If women would give up copying every new wrinkle of fashion and custom, if they would refuse to accept popular models and hold to instinctive proprieties this world would be a better place.

Heretofore nobody has dared to question the supremacy of the perfectly groomed and well-mannered lady. She has so long stood as the model of her sex that it is an act of temerity to seek to dethrone her. Nevertheless I seek to do so. I say she is tiresome, that her "taste" is questionable, that her influence on society is unwholesome. Young women of limited means try to copy her and thus place living on an

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impractical scale. They set a bar against marriage and make the family impossible, because each woman wishes to be idle, beautiful to look upon, accomplished in some way, and to have soft hands and rosy finger nails and fluffy hair. The man woman, the woman athlete, the bachelor maid, the "bohemian" literary woman with "advanced" views are all offshoots of this morbid ladyhood, unwholesome reactions from too much niceness.

When we think of the turning over of a new leaf we always think of it as being a man's reform. We have grown so accustomed to think of women as good and men as bad that there never seems any need for women to turn over a new leaf. But I appeal to my sex to try it. Throw away the copy book, and start out on original lines. This world has run to seed on doing the proper thing. The sameness of it is terrible and I do not wonder men break away and commit immoralities to interrupt the fearful monotony of elegance and correctness in which nice women are contented to live. I can't help laughing over the atti-

tude of the really fashionable woman. Usually she has a husband who is "drawed like a badger" and who makes a background for her spectacular plays. She never sees herself in her true light. It never occurs to her that it is cheap to be a lady of elegant leisure. She never feels what it means to be "kept" in sordid idleness. She does not realise that her only activity is one which the world could well dispense with.

I want women to turn over a new leaf and instead of writing their plea for "recognition" and the record of their wrongs, begin inscribing in simpler characters the real joy of living. For years we have heard of woman only as a complaining slave. Can we not come out of the abused attitude and live fully and freely? Can we not make away with a lot of our affectations and trample upon the shackles we ourselves have forged by simply running to seed on proprieties and social ethics? The creed of the modern woman is: "Say the right thing; do the right thing; look the right thing"; I persist she has run this creed into the ground and made her life read like certain

cut and dried books of modern printing, in which the correctness of the people stands out with startling newness and envelopes the reader in an atmosphere of fresh paint and plaster. This extreme correctness is achieved by a striving which bespeaks the parvenu. I hope my women friends will begin a reform with resolutions to be less like somebody else and more like themselves, to do as they wish to do, not as some other woman sets the pace. There are too many ladies in the world now. We need women who like plain days of life, and who do not feel that they are in the eyes of the public. Why must we all be playing to the grandstand? Can we not learn that the tribunal of dull pupils from whose derision I used to shrink was the grandstand? When you are copying accurately you are one of many, but you will be remembered longer if your page is not so perfect.

Poor people like me who have lived in a ragged little byway of life are wont to feel that the fiat goes forth from people who are in touch with the tides of commerce and national affairs and the great social

world. I doubt that this fiat amounts to much, and I am very sure that it has weight with the individual only as he allows it to.

I wish I might reach the hearts of women and arouse them to a full appreciation of the fact that they need n't copy the superfluities of life that our sex makes so much of. I wish I could shake them wide awake to the importance of little daily affairs that have to do with the bodily life — the clear fire, the good dinner, the simple house-keeping and home-keeping that is woman's best estate.

So, come with me through the experiences and reflections of some busy plain days of life as I have tried to put them down in this book, and see if they are not better than fashionable functions, company manners, and days of idleness and entertainment.

## II

### THE WOMAN WHO WEARS THE HALO

**B**EING a plain country woman, born and reared in a little inland town, I lived a good many years of my life before it occurred to me to speak out in meeting and say a few words that might reflect the daily reveries of thousands of women situated as I am, and reassure them a little as to the purpose of their being, which seems at times to be called into question by leaders of the woman movement. There are plenty of hard-headed, sensible women who know that the woman movement is a delusion, and who have the hardihood to smile indulgently when the woman lecturer comes telling us what is the matter with us, and to get up the next morning and take up the business of life in perfect peace of mind, undisturbed by the suggestion that

women ought to be looking after higher things.

There is nothing the matter with the most of us aside from the natural afflictions that flesh is heir to, and most of the aspirations that women are struggling with are fool notions promulgated by somebody who has n't anything better to do.

I heartily dislike the idea of there being a "woman question," but suppose if there is one it hinges upon woman suffrage. I get dreadfully tired of the reiteration of the suffragists and the persistent division between men and women that they themselves make by constantly seeking to bring women into prominence. I hate references to what women are doing. It would be so much better simply to say "what people are doing." The very stress upon the matter of sex implies that it is a miraculous thing for a woman to do anything. Women prove themselves to be in the infancy of their mental development by calling attention to the capers they cut, and particularly so because in no branch of art or industry has woman, as a class, proved herself the equal of man.

Though our list of notable women is a long one, the fact remains that the great geniuses of the world have been men. This should not be especially discouraging to women. The world does n't need many geniuses. If you ever lived in the house with one you would be convinced that a little of him goes a long way, and after he was gone, and the family happily back into the old rut of being nobody in particular and having a good time, you would count your many blessings in a very tranquil state of mind.

Woman attained her highest glory centuries ago, and the brightest halo that is worn by any face in our galaxy of saints and immortals is won not by any distinction of genius or of valour — though the woman who wears it has both — but rather by the simple carrying out of a manifest destiny, a brave and cheerful acceptance of the existing order of things.

I am not much of a reformer, being doubtful of the real good of many things that we call progress, but I am not going to set myself in the path and get run over by them.

One can keep out of their way and besides, although there is a lot of fuss over the changing conditions of woman's lot and the new régime, when the shouting and the tumult die it will be seen that there is a respectable minority living close to the ground, holding to the old ideals, and, above all, minding their own business — which is genius of the highest order.

I am not much of a suffragist, either, if the truth must be told, possibly because I have always had so many more rights than I knew what to do with. There are already so many more things than one can attend to that it seems to me if I had the franchise and should suddenly find some added duties of citizenship thrust upon me it would be the last straw.

There has never been any let or hindrance to my life. I am free to fire the furnace, shovel the snow out of the paths, hoe in the garden, dig potatoes, whitewash the back fence, trim the grapevines, curry the horse, or engage in any other manly occupation I choose. If a burglar gets in the house I can get up and shoot him if I want to. If I take

a notion to go anywhere I can get on the train, take my own money, pay the hotel bill, and stay as long as I please.

My husband believes in woman suffrage. He is willing, even anxious, for me to vote. He runs a Democratic newspaper in a strongly Republican county, and he often needs my vote and wishes he had it. I have no doubt if we had woman suffrage he would see that I got to the polls. He always sends our horse and buggy out to the poor-farm for the few paupers who remain staunch in the face of Republican prosperity, and, as they have to pass our house, no doubt they would stop for me on the return trip. The only condition would be: if I had time to go. And then I feel sure I should worry all night under the impression that I had made a mistake in some way and not stamped the rooster! I am not very methodical. Personally, I should n't mind this uncertainty, but my husband knows the poll of our precinct to a vote, and if there were one out of pocket I am sure he would lay it on me and accuse me of doing it on purpose. I have n't any political convictions whatever, and it would

be a lot of trouble to have to acquire them at my time of life.

I am a great hand for living a day at a time, and I presume this is the reason I have n't many convictions. A day is n't long enough for them to form in, and by the next day there is always something else to do.

I do not know whether this is the best way to live, but it has its advantages. In looking back it seems as if there were a lot of days — and that is a good thing! A long string of days, each with its complete story, is like a rosary of fragrant sandalwood.

I remember days better than years, and some of the days seem the longer — no doubt they are. Our little chronology may not count for much in the great reckoning, but supposing there should be a day or an hour in our brief span that was worthy of being noted in the calendar of Eternity? How then? The day belongs especially to the women. Men think in years and decades, but woman's life is in the details of the big scheme of things, and she sometimes rebels that it is so, and wishes that she, too, might take a hand at epoch-making.

I have said to you that I have n't many settled convictions, and this is true; but I do have leanings toward certain doctrines, and among them is the idea of reincarnation — that is, of our coming back again and again to try it all over until we learn. Surely the women who have never had to work are not worth saving until they have been tried in the fire of daily toil.

Some years ago there came a rumour, trailing over the country, as the folk-songs travel on the gossamer threads, that there was something new for woman. It unsettled us all a little. I was young and easily unsettled, and I felt a strong desire to go in for higher things, but fortunately never got the chance. I did go to cooking school, though, and learned how to serve things in bits of millinery and how to work over scraps of things we so seldom had at home that there was never a scrap left. I came home one November afternoon and began telling mother about some new recipes I had learned. She listened and finally asked: "Did she give you a recipe for pulling turnips? That is what I have been

doing all afternoon." I thought it a little sarcastic of mother to say this, but have since looked at it in a different light. The turnips had to be pulled you know, because it was going to freeze that night.

My mother was not a new woman, but I am quite sure she had the proper theory of life. You never went into her kitchen but you found there a copy of some entertaining or instructive book. You never helped her wash the dishes without learning something widely removed from dishes. Hers was the secret of a most successful way of living, and it is a way that any thinking woman can adopt. She could not go out into the world, but she could bring the world to her.

Wherever you are, wherever there is a point of alert, interested consciousness, there is the centre of the universe. To be interested is to be happy, and to be happy is simply to be in accord with your word. A sense of this truth may come to you anywhere — over the washtub, out in the garden where the early corn is rustling, in the poultry-yard when you hear the sleepy chirp of a little chick under its mother's wing. If you

have suddenly felt yourself thus in touch with the Universal, know that it is a revelation, but do not be in a hurry to tell about it.

The way to do things is to do them, and the way to be somebody is just to be it.

There is never any glory in trying to do something which you cannot do, but there is always great honour and credit in doing anything well. Being a plain home woman is one of the greatest successes in life, if to plainness you add kindness, tolerance, and interest, real interest in simple things.

There is a text of Scripture that applies particularly to women, and I think of it when I see one of our village women with a delicate ivory-tinted face and snow-white hair — “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove” — and I smile when I see how intrinsic is that spirit of womanliness that rises white and unsmirched from life’s scullery and its seeming degradations, and I wonder why it is that we are called upon to see and know all the unspeakable side of life, to bear the burden of it — do the menial tasks, hustle out of sight the debris, the ghastly accumula-

tions of daily living, and make the face of life sweet and attractive for man, for coarse, sinful, unsympathetic man, who is big and strong, yet who cannot bear the sight of such things! Then, after wondering a bit I come back to the old doctrine that service is the crowning glory of life, and that through it alone do we lay hold upon the eternal; and then I cease to wonder how mother gets her halo — I know, and I know, too, that it is none too bright and glorious for the service by which she earns it. Every woman is a mother at heart, but it takes a mother in fact to know things just as they are.

When I am feeling quite well, and my joints and muscles sing with the joy of living, I am glad to the heart that God put me in the industrial school of life and allowed me to take in its lessons at my finger tips. But when I am sick, and the physical machinery runs heavily, I fret a good deal, and feel envious of those women who have never had to learn the real lesson of life.

I think no great lady with her knowledge of the world, her fine philosophies, and her education, can tell a bright, sensible woman

who has borne children and has done her own housework anything really worth hearing about woman's life. I believe no preacher with his hands soft from idleness can instruct her, and I feel sure that no layman with a reasonable share of mother-wit would attempt it. When it comes to arriving at the point she has the right-of-way, and if she rules the house and makes the entire family walk a chalk-line it is no more than she ought to do! The intelligent woman who has done real work — and by real work I mean labour with her own hands year after year in her own house and kitchen — and who has meanwhile reared a creditable family and still kept for her soul a pair of wings like a dove, is the perfect flower of civilisation, far superior to the woman of the world who knows the lingo of polite society and little else.

The people who count in this world are those who, if everybody were suddenly stripped of every worldly possession, cast upon a desert shore, and confronted with only the raw material for living, would know how to take hold of it.

I was telling a woman who was visiting me of my preparations for a dinner, and how I went out early in the morning of the day before and killed the turkey. She held up her hands in horror.

"My dear, you did n't kill it yourself?"

"Yes, I killed it, and it was a twenty-pound gobbler and came pretty near to killing me!"

"But how could you kill it?" she said. "I could n't kill a chicken if my life depended on it."

I looked at her speculatively, and I declare I believe it was true. I don't believe she could kill one. I think she would just daintily curl up and die first.

"Why, Mrs. Blank," I said, "if my children were hungry, and there was n't anyone else to do it, I could go out myself and kill a cow!"

I don't like to kill things; in fact, I hate to, but I can if I must. And this makes me think of a little episode in my life. I have been accused of having psychic powers, but really I am not so gifted, though I have had some peculiar experiences in having

dreams come true and seeing things that are not strictly in the landscape.

One Saturday morning, several years ago, I got up with the feeling of being at the end of the rope. I don't know how often I have been at the end of it — a good many times, I suppose — but nobody would ever help me let go. This morning, however, I felt I simply must let go. I was sick and tired and discouraged. I felt that it was too bad for me to be ploughing around the kitchen at work when the sun was shining, and lots of people were out riding in parks, and sailing for Europe, and doing all of the beautiful things I was quite as well fitted to enjoy, but would never do.

After I got the dishes washed, and the bread made up, and a cake baked, and the porches scrubbed, I remembered about two chickens I had put under a tub the night before to be dressed for Sunday. There was just about time to wring their necks and dress them and get them safely on the ice before I started in to get dinner. But I was seized with a violent attack of the dreadful "I don't want to's." I went into

the library and lay down on the lounge, just flattened out. I said to myself that I did n't care if the chickens smothered under that tub — the sun was getting dreadfully hot by this time — nor if the children did n't have any fried chicken for Sunday dinner. I did n't care for anything — I was at the end of the rope!

My mother used to have a way of taking down the Bible, opening at random and reading the seventh verse. She said it invariably gave you a clew to the solution of your difficulties. There was a big, old-fashioned dog-eared Testament on the table just within reach of my hand. I took it listlessly, opened it, ran my eye down to verse seventh of the eleventh chapter of the Acts, which I happened upon, and read the words : "And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter ; slay and eat." (At home I have the reputation of telling yarns, and they pretend not to believe me when I recount anything marvellous. But I don't tell yarns. Truth is stranger than fiction, and this actually happened just as I have told it.)

When I read the verse I broke out laugh-

ing. And when you are downhearted a laugh is the only thing that will cure you. I felt better instantly, got up, and went out and slew the fowls, and got through the day in good shape.

It is not easy to laugh when one is tired, and really I am afraid my sisters are a little lacking in a sense of humour. I wish when Adam gave up that rib he had also parted with some of the funny-bone, so that his helpmeet might be able to see the joke oftener. It would be a good deal of use to her when the clothes-line breaks or when the cow kicks the bucket over.

We can't help holding a little grudge against life for making us do the little, menial, hateful things that women must do, and my knowledge of the fact that those who can do them and still be sweet and fine are the chosen ones does n't help me in certain moods. I think rebelliously that I would rather not be a chosen one, but be allowed to slip along easily, neither learning nor developing.

I know quite well how it is with many people who have the things I think I long

for. I know that the people who run away from winter and summer, impiously "making their own climate," are running away from life. They are loosening the blessed moorings of home and gaining only the curse of the roving foot. I know that people who can buy fruit out of season are purchasing satiety and spoiling their taste for the simple and sweet products of the earth as they come to us according to Nature's plan. I know that the rich have no treasures. Nothing excites them with a sense of novelty. The little purchase, the little journey, the little glimpse of society that seems a wonder to me means nothing to them. They have tried everything ; and people must be interested, so they fall back upon immoralities, pitifully seeking for new sensations. Now, I do not mean that all rich women do this, for many rich women have sense enough to live above wealth, just as the rest of us live above poverty; but this state of affairs exists in very "high" society, and the reason for it is apparent.

A woman may know all this and still in moments of despondency half wish that she,

too, might live the idle, irresponsible life of flowers and light and music and perfume.

In thinking of men and women it is difficult to select from the male sex a type of the ideal man, but the heart leaps instantly in homage to the feet of the woman who wears the halo, and is to wear it, please God, till the end of time. I think it will always be an old-fashioned face, a little worn with time and toil, a little touched with sorrow, a little lacking in that hard, manly knowledge one sees in the faces of woman-suffrage speakers. Woman's lot will change with changing times, but the conditions for wearing the halo will remain the same. Women may attain a certain freedom of action, but there will be no more freedom of mind. Mind is always free. We have been told that the book, the picture, the piece of music must, if it is to be called true art, be of a great simplicity, that the wayfaring man can understand. So this face that wears the halo must be written in lines that every human being can read. It must not show too many of the refinements of life, or much pride of culture or learning. It must be a rugged

face, warmly touched with tenderness, lightly brushed with ladyhood to endear it to the truly refined, but with no affectations nor superfluous elegancies to frighten the timid or repel the humble.

### III

#### BY WAY OF RETROSPECT

**I**N one of my philosophic moods the other day I fell to wondering what in the world the poet (Gray, was it not?) meant by speaking of the short and simple annals of the poor. If there is anything in the world that is eventful it is being poor. Poverty figures in novels and romances almost as largely as love, and I do believe the dearest stories in all the world are about poor people. Where would be the charm in "Little Women" if the March family had been rich, or who would have cared half so much for Jane Eyre if she had not wandered out penniless and alone and had not nearly died of "starvation and sorrow"? I am desperately fond of an impecunious heroine. I want her to look prettier in her skimpy gray gown and white gull's feather than the black-eyed heiress in her velvet and sables. But truth

compels me to state that I have a sneaking fancy for the hero with a fair backing of filthy lucre, or at least a rich uncle in the background, who dies in the nick of time. I am sentimental to a degree, but I want a financial basis of some sort. It is very uncomfortable for me to see a hero and heroine launched on the ocean of life with only love for their guiding star. No doubt my own experience has shown me how good a thing a little of the dross of riches might be, even for those who think they care only for love.

However, Mr. Gray to the contrary, I insist that the annals of the poor are anything but short and simple, and are, on the other hand, fraught with excitement, exigencies, makeshifts, romances, and little tragedies of which the rich, the stupid rich, know nothing. I am glad that my memory goes back to old-fashioned village scenes, to times when we lived close to life and primitive things, and Nature was very near to us, and we never went very far from the beginning of things. As we grow older the charm of simplicity grows upon us. We wish to put away the complications of our lives and

to get back once more to a sense of nearness to mother earth — dear mother earth, who told us all we know and in whose rugged bosom we shall sleep at last.

In the old days we lived a religious life. The church was much to us. Sunday was the jewel of the week; our workaday world was toned and modulated by spiritual emotions and teachings. My father died when I was a tiny girl and it was my mother's idea to bring us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. To this end every function of the household arrangement was turned, and the mere suggestion that we were not in special charge of divine authority would have been received as rank heresy. I was an arrant little pagan from the start, given to cat-napping through thirdlies and fourthlies, and to bringing my elders up short with unanswerable questions deemed perfectly scandalous by my aunts, but forgiven in secret by my mother, who in moments of loving communion admitted that there were many things one could not explain, but must just take on faith. We took so much on faith in those days that I surely should not re-

pudiate it now, and I would not, only that it does seem we a'so owe a good deal to the staying qualities of the old Franklin stove, the three-ply carpet, and the silver spoons that were great-grandmother's.

We had great pretensions to gentility. We had good blood in us, but I have seen the time, sitting in the sanctuary, looking ruefully at my copper-toed shoes and inwardly loathing my "waterproof" cloak, that I really cared as little for good blood as I did for faith, heartily wishing myself rid of both, like the little girl who sat behind me, resplendent in pretty and fashionable garments, kid shoes, and a hat with a feather in it! In vain my mother told me the little girl was "common"; that she lived in a rented house, and her mother used bad grammar. I wished to live in a rented house. I was tired of our house, with its queer little windows, its bleak white front door and the garden hugging it quite up to the back porch. Some people had iron fences; ours was a high, white "picket" affair, with rather unsteady gate-posts, and I resented the fact that the weight on the chain which

pulled the gate shut was a jug — just a stone jug — when some people had stylish weights to their chains, made on purpose. The fact was there were many things we had which were not “made on purpose,” but which would “do.”

Meanwhile our “annals” continued to be exciting. There was always some crisis at hand. The daily business of eating and drinking, over which my mother and aunt had personal supervision, was interspersed with problems of consuming interest. There was invariably a quilt in the frames or a carpet in the loom, or there was a garden making, or apple-butter stirring, or hog killing. In lieu of these stirring events there was the never-ending problem of wherewithal shall ye be clothed. Miracles of evolving something out of nothing were being constantly worked, and the result was an aggressive gentility, which, being a little pagan, as afore-said, I cordially hated. In the midst of all this strenuous, happy life we found time for mild social occasions. Inviting the minister’s family for tea was a yearly ceremony, and there were also neighbours and visiting

dignitaries to be entertained at stated intervals. The discipline of children in those days was a thing to make the devils believe and tremble. I could be relied on to misbehave and get a whipping after the company was gone, so I really dreaded the social aspect of our lives as much as the genteel phases.

The presence of chicken and jelly in the cut-glass dish usually sobered me to some extent, but the dreadful threats as to what would be done to us if we should laugh or speak at the table so worked upon our sensibilities that we invariably gave way from sheer nervousness and laughed out, leaving the company to speculate whether it was the preacher's whiskers, which had a funny way of wagging up and down when he ate, or our uncle's peculiar method of "making an eye" at us to enforce discipline that had started us going.

There was a little, shiny, brown teapot that was a great comfort to me at such times. It reflected my face in all sorts of queer distortions, and, oddly enough, this had a tranquillising influence upon me, the only

difficulty being that when I tried the effect of twisting my face up to see how it would look, I was invariably accused at the bar of justice, to which I was brought later, of having made faces at my aunt, who sat behind the teapot — a perfect pillar of gentility, with her best fringed cape and white apron, and her hair puffed at each side of her head into what we children irreverently called “horns.”

In spite of the drawbacks incident to the original sin of childhoods, I liked these social occasions. There was a sense of opulence in having a fire in the parlour and spare bedroom, and one could afford to swagger a little out on the sidewalk when he met other children whose mothers were cutting carpet-rags when ours was giving a tea party. Every dog has his day.

I do not remember just where it was that the church slipped out of my life, and prayer-meeting was no longer an event of the week, but I fear it was about the time that certain young gentlemen began dropping in, in time for the last hymn or hanging about the doors with a crooked arm and a half-whispered

“May I see you home?” Be that as it may, there were many years in which as a family we filed down the aisle to the third pew from the front every Wednesday evening for prayer-meeting. And here again the question of discipline was a vexing one. My sister and I between us had almost enough sense of humour to have made a man of us. You may believe this when I tell you that we invariably found fun in a Wednesday evening prayer-meeting. There was an old lady who pulled at her husband’s coat-tail when he talked too long. Our uncle had a habit of going to sleep, making it necessary to poke him when called upon to lead in prayer, and once our aunt went to this same Wednesday evening service with her bonnet on hind side in front. In later years I have seen bonnets and hats that really looked quite as rational one way as another, but this was a sincere, open-face bonnet and the wayfaring man could tell at a glance when it was not properly adjusted. We made the discovery after we were seated and the hymn had been given out. It was “Coronation” and pitched

rather high so the little shrieks of laughter my sister and I gave were drowned in the shouts of "And Crown Him !" that went up as my aunt, having discovered the mistake, calmly took off the misplaced head-gear and turned it around. This time we were not punished for laughing in meeting. There is a limit even to discipline and our mother was mindful of us and remembered that we were dust.

When I think how my own children were allowed to take part in the conversation, laugh at nothing, run and tear over the house, and speak at all times, whether spoken to or not, and see how much better they are than I ever was, I think that in my day children were little martyrs. I remember that my sister remained under a dark cloud of family displeasure for an entire summer because she told her grandmother that she ran like a cow. I suffered for her because of the snubs she got after her unlucky speech, and did all I could to alleviate her disgraced position. I even went so far as to confide in her that no matter how unpopular her comparison of her grandparent's means of

locomotion to those of a cow might be among grown folk, I thought she did run like one, and so did our little sister and our cousins, and that, moreover, grandma was an "old thing." I am a little ashamed of this now, in view of the fact that my grandmother was an uncommonly bright woman, but if she had only known enough to laugh at what my sister said, instead of going on her dignity over it, the effect upon the child would have been infinitely better.

I believe that the popular idea of happiness is to be able to live in luxury. I have never tried it, but I feel somehow that it would be irksome. There must be more zest in living the closer one gets to the rudiments of life. We hear women complain of dullness and see them searching through the days and years for something of real interest to fill their hearts and atone for the things of which civilisation has robbed them. The gentle village women whom I knew in my childhood had no such anxieties. There was no time for ennui, and I believe there was fineness and quality in their lives that is woefully lacking in the lives of women to-

day. Nothing is more undignified and underbred than restlessness and discontent—and I think with regret of the placidity of the lives of those women of a past generation. How smoothly the work went on and how sweet were those homely industries, followed without a thought of regret or any sense of injustice in having to follow them.

I realise the fact that, though youth is far enough behind me, I am still too young to indulge so much in retrospect. Retrospect is for the chimney corner, with knitting and patchwork, and one ought really to save it up with this in view and go on making history until the last moment so that the stores of reminiscence may be full to repletion. Perhaps, then, when the evil days do come, the household will not tire so dreadfully of our repertory. If one did not repeat the same story oftener than, say once in six months or such a matter, one might hope to hold an audience among the juvenile members of the family for some years. However, the retrospective habit grows upon me, and with it a tendency to philosophy and reflection really dangerous to a woman who

still wears gay colours and tries to wear her hair in pompadour.

I remember many queer implements perfectly familiar to my childhood, which would not be recognised by half the grown people to-day. Carding machines and candle moulds, quilting-frames and steelyards, snuffers and sand boxes, reels and spindles and lead-ladles and bullet moulds!

One family in our neighbourhood enjoyed the distinction of owning a "grab-hook." The uses of the well were more varied than they are to-day. Nearly all wells were open with windlasses of some sort for drawing water and low curbs, which were a standing invitation to children and little boys like Johnny Green of Mother Goose fame, who were seized with a desire to play a serious practical joke on the family cat. The well was commonly used as a refrigerator, milk, butter, eggs, custards, and all sorts of things being suspended into the cool depths on hot summer days. The frequency of accidents called the grab-hook into requisition so often that it was regarded as common property, and barefoot youngsters were apt to

dodge in at the kitchen door with such requests as, "Say, Mrs. ———, will you let ma have the grab-hook? Our bucket's gone to the bottom." Or, "Can I get the grab-hook? Ma's butter's fell in the well."

I often wonder how in a day's time all the work was done, but I recollect that it was a wonderfully cheerful way of living. There was much sunshine in it. I can see it now filtering through the grape arbour and making little checkers through the hop vines on the back porch, where somebody was ironing and the churn dasher was thumping, another was sewing, one child cleaning and decorating the bird-cage, while the others were playing or helping, with bits of work destined to be part of their education in later years.

Yes, there is much sunshine in these short and simple annals of the poor! Our poverty, however, was not of the worst sort. We were poor only in worldly goods and gear. Our spiritual and intellectual endowment was very fair. There is no poverty like narrowness of mind and soul, but we had treasures that moth and rust could not corrupt. Poetry, history, books of travel and

romance made bright the hours of winter evenings. Discussions of questions in philosophy, theology, and national politics hastened the hours of toil. We were not unhappy people.

It is a doctrine of mine that the quality of mind does not change with what we call civilisation, except for the worse. In luxury the mind deteriorates, while simple and primitive living lightens it. It is good fortune to be born in a quiet country place close to fields and water and real work, and the woods and animals, the trees and clouds and weather — and all sorts of teachers. Money and society and colleges and even travel have little to teach in comparison with life. Be careful, then, how you classify the lives of the poor as paltry, or say of a friend who has known the storm and stress of poverty: "It is a pity." Never pity anybody who can say of his youth: "There was much of sunshine in it." Beware also of choosing the member of the family who has "got to be worth something" as the successful man. Success in life is a personal matter — it is the individual life that counts. Our

modern civilisation is the worst enemy to the individual life. There is too much herding together. Eating has become largely a spiritless and mechanical affair. Food which is prepared by other than loving hands loses the essence of soul nourishment that was an element of mother's cooking in the old village days when we were so happy and so poor.

Deliver me from people who take their pleasure in material things. Life has so many better things to offer that the greatest pity of all seems to me to be for people who care most for hats and gowns, chairs and rugs and all the soulless things made by man. Nothing is quite so common as style. Nothing so tiresome as mere etiquette, nothing so nauseating as the round of stupid gatherings we call society, and nothing so execrable as what women like to call "culture." Men never use this atrocious word. They could not do it and look each other in the face. The very intimation that a woman is "cultured" is enough to cause me to take to the woods in terror lest I should hear her do "stunts" of modulation with her voice and see her fix her massaged and "preserved"

face into smirks of cultured toleration for me and my crudeness. I make no special crusade against "cultured" women (there are no cultured men — when they become hopelessly cultured they are all the same sex), but I do resent their claim upon being "the real thing." Just now in our shifting and unstable civilisation there is little enough of the real thing. Our society is chaotic, because classes are not definitely assigned. Nothing is more fatally sure than for a people who are seeking a real democracy to become divided into two great classes, the rich and the poor. If birth does not count (though we all know in our souls that it is the only thing that does count) money is certain to become the criterion. Meanwhile, people who care for "a few friends and many books" must content themselves with such unwritten laws of natural selection as their environment permits, and for the rest cultivate selfishness with might and main.

If we are going to admit it, which we are not, life comes pretty near to being a tragedy at best. Only home and quiet days of sweet renunciation and tremulous hope, only the

family and the fireside, the love of man and woman held together by children of that love can save it from being so. Only great Nature, with her wonderful variety, her philosophy and promise, her insistent religion, her reiteration of God before law, can fortify us for the trials of life and its final apparent defeat. All of these are the special blessings of the poor, and he only is really poor who fails to use them. I am so devoted to my village, with its sweet simplicity, its quiet intelligence, its near friendships, and its general "hominess," that nothing could draw me away from it save the promise of a still simpler life in a really "new" country, where brains and muscle and physical strength and courage are the things that count. But I should be lost there now. One goes to a new country while he still has youth, and I forget very often that mine is gone. I am a girl until I look in the glass or hear some young person place me with the middle-aged people, or take thought how long ago things happened, and remember that my lengthy and brilliant annals of the poor transpired far back in a past century.

## IV

### A FEBRUARY MONOLOGUE

OUR family has a way of making up expressions which nobody else ever heard of. One of them was "We are having a wallowing time." This meant that things were badly congested and that we were having a more perplexing time than usual to keep the "old ark a moverin" which was saying a great deal. Necessity is the mother of invention, and it seemed very often that the peculiar exigencies and trials we were singularly disposed to demanded a new vocabulary. Life was never very smooth sailing for any of us and it was a common thing for one branch of the family to ask with deep concern: "Well, how are you getting along?"

There were no telephones in those days to carry bad tidings, or good ones either, so we just had to wait until Saturday, when

somebody came to town, or maybe Sunday, after church was over, to unbosom ourselves of any new turn of untoward fate which we assiduously refrained from mentioning to the neighbours, but told to the "kin" when we got a chance. Of course, if it was very bad, like your smoke-house getting afire and burning up your yearly supply of meat, or the lightning striking your cow, or somebody being "bad sick," we sent a messenger, but this sort of adversity had its charm. There was an element of excitement in it, and we children got a good deal of satisfaction watching from the front gate to see the old rockaway, drawn by Ned and Pete, two shaggy farm horses, round the village corner, and to speculate as to which aunt or aunts had come to condole and sustain. I liked Aunt Lizzie best because she always laughed and said: "Cheer up now, I have never seen the righteous man forsaken or his seed begging for bread!" And then we would all sit down to a dinner of spring lamb and green peas, dainty asparagus tips, crisp, fresh lettuce, rhubarb pie, peach preserves and thick clotted cream (unless this

was the time the lightning struck the cow, and even then there might have been some still left in the water-trough at the milk house) and other things that seemed to just "grow" in those days.

I remember hearing this same merry-faced aunt say to my mother once along toward the end of a hard winter when the yarn stockings looked as if they just would not last through, and we had run out of carpet rags, and the back of the kitchen stove had caved in, and the "stone coal" was dwindling away, and uncle's term of office about to expire, and the spring taxes staring us in the face: "Well, how are you getting along?" Mother replied: "Oh, we are just wallowing in the trough of the sea. I am afraid we can't navigate!" If they had n't both laughed immediately I think I should have died of heart failure, and thus lightened the heavily-freighted domestic vessel of my little weight, at least. I always watched intently for the glimmer of a smile during these family conferences, and, happily, seldom failed of finding it, for we were philosophers in our day and generation, and

humourists as well, and we had that rare faculty of seeing the joke which is such a precious treasure to us through this vale of tears.

After this conversation between the two ladies, we often spoke of having a "wallowing" time when things were very much out of fix with the domestic machinery.

For years my sister and I have had the habit of hastily knocking on wood before admitting that we were getting along pretty well, but one late February afternoon she came down for a long afternoon visit and we fell to canvassing the family affairs, and after dragging all of our skeletons to light and putting them back again in good order we came to the comforting conclusion that things might be worse. I said to her in the words of "Granny" when she paraphrases Omar:

Come, now, cheer up and have a cup of tea,  
Things ain't so bad but what they might be worse.

We forgot all about knocking on wood and I put my shawl over my head and went a piece of the way home with her and felt

the rare sensation of the suggestion of spring in the twilight when the sunset burns clear and primrose colour behind the woods and there is a breath, intangible and sweet, that brings us a promise — ah, what promise, dear heart! Anyway, I came home and sat down by the glowing fire and was happy, and never once thought of “knocking on wood.” That very evening things began happening, and they have kept it up with cheerful alacrity ever since. Not great things, maybe, but little, nagging annoyances — and it is the little foxes that spoil the vines.

Affliction can't hold a candle to daily care and worry and friction, to the dull grind of making bricks without straw — the monotonous task of trying to like what you have. When affliction comes, your friends rally round you — at least those who amount to anything — but when it is merely dull, monotonous, straining sorrow or care, they are dreadfully hard with you and say you brought it on yourself, or that you have a mania for looking on the dark side.

I have never yet known it to fail that when

I was just at the last straw limit, the man of the house fell ill. I am told it is a way they have, and I am quite sure I never knew the family to get into deep waters, but that the maid either took sick or left. Of all the afflictions that can befall a household, having the man of the house ailing is the worst. A sick man is God's ignoblest work. When a man is sick you might just as well abuse him first as last, because he is determined it shall be so. Take up cold coffee and cold toast and a cold egg for his breakfast. Never try to keep them hot—it irritates him. He wishes them to be cold and have no taste to them, so he can give up after a few ineffectual attempts to eat, and lie back on his pillow with a sigh and a reproachful glance and ask you to send for his sister, and perhaps she can cook something he can eat.

I had this experience once long ago. My husband had the mumps. I gently told him that nothing tastes very good when one has the mumps. He wished to drink buttermilk, but I felt that the acid in it would hurt his swollen jaw dreadfully, and

tried to dissuade him. It is a test of woman's love to see her hero with his jaws swollen out of all reason and bound up in red flannel.

Finally I sent for his sister, and he laid in his complaints to her and told her he wanted some buttermilk, and he wished to drink it out of the pitcher as he used to when he was a boy and slipped into the old milk-house on a hot summer afternoon; poor fellow, he had fever, I suppose, and was wishing with boyish impatience and lack of reason to be rid of it. His sister is a wonderfully good woman, and broad and charitable in her views, but no man's mother or sister ever lived who was n't just a little prejudiced against his wife. This is perfectly natural. I am sure I should be so. If I had a grown-up son or brother, I know I never could quite love the woman he chose in preference to me. And this reminds me of one of a little bunch of stories I was writing the other day under the title, "The Pains That Wars and Women Have." Here is the story:

"A man twenty-five years old sat with his head in a woman's lap. His shoulders were

shaken with dry sobbing, and the woman gently stroked his hair. 'Mother, mother,' he muttered, 'it is n't so much giving her up — I could bear that — but having to stand and see her given to another man, a man whom I detest, that is what I cannot endure!' 'Will it be worse, my son, than seeing the man you love given to a woman whom you detest?' asked the mother. 'Because that is what would have happened to me if you had won her.'"

But this is neither here nor there. My husband's sister is fine, and if, as she took that big pitcher of buttermilk to the bed for her mummy brother, to drink deep, like Lord Marmion, of the flood, she had just a faint air of reproof toward me, I hereby excuse her for it. The first gulp took effect on the irritated salivary glands, and with a roar the invalid fell back, taking the pitcher with him and deluging himself and the red flannel bandages and the bed, to say nothing of wasting the good buttermilk I had meant to make biscuits and gingerbread and maybe light bread, too, out of. You can make lovely light bread with buttermilk.

This disaster was far worse than the one which happened to Sweet Kitty, of Coleraine, for in that case the "sweet buttermilk" only "watered the plain," and this gave the mumpy patient a full bath and his sister had the pleasure of straightening him up and getting his bed in order. My husband says I am the most unsympathetic nurse alive, and maybe I am. At any rate when I saw that pitcher go over, heard the roar of pain, witnessed the change from masterful solicitude to plain everyday exasperation that passed over the benign visage of my favourite sister-in-law, I made a home-run for the kitchen, where I bent double on the edge of the wood-box and added ten years to my life by laughing till the tears rolled down.

No, I am not much of a nurse. There is too much of the savage in me — the primal instinct for life that deserts the afflicted. Does n't that sound dreadful — but then, you know, I never really do it. I struggle fiercely against sickness and I wish everybody to do the same, and I do get outdone with a man when he goes to bed with a silly pain that a woman at a big reception with

her new gown on, or one over the wash-tub in a tenement house, would bear with never a thought of flinching.

I have had sick people say to me quite often, "You seem so alive when you come into the room, you seem to bring life with you, in your voice, your step, your touch!" Perhaps the reason for this is because I do so love life and so desire that the patient shall feel well again. I bring him the suggestion of health and good spirits, but I am a poor nurse, except in extremes of life and death; then I do fairly well.

Among the many cares that have beset me in the last month (February is my hard-luck month always) has been a sick neighbour. It is dreadfully trying to have to sit and write for the press when your neighbour is sick and you want to go over and clean up her kitchen and give the children a bath. These children are pretty, and everybody is anxious to do for them, for nothing is more forlorn than little children whose mother, who has been their nurse and also maid of all work for the household, lies helplessly ill. My neighbours are com-

parative strangers in the town, and there are no relatives to come in and administer buttermilk and other little intimate attentions. The only bright side to the affair is the fact that after the first day or two of fretting around mother's bed, the youngsters do not know they are forlorn, but take happily to the disorder of the house and the new hired girl who can't cook and whose special talent seems to be to carry out all over the house the unmistakable evidences of its mistress being *hors de combat*.

A week or more ago an aunt appeared upon the scene and it was decided she should take the little girl home with her. The little girl is what farmers call a "good feeler." She is nearly three and is about as fair an example of perpetual motion as one could find on a February day when somebody is ill and there is a special reason for keeping quiet. She is such a pretty little soul, I pitied her mother having to give her up, but I did n't say so, and helped all I could to get her started. I heard the hack which was to take her and her aunt to the early train depart and I wept a little

for sympathy with the sick mother having to kiss this darling baby good-bye — who knows for how long? I did n't get over all day — for I am the slave of the pen as the genii of Aladdin were slaves of the ring—but in the evening I slipped off a minute thinking I might console the little brother who I knew would be lonely, by telling him his favourite story of “the three bears.” He is a good child and though he is only five, full of the manliest sort of ideas about “taking care of mamma.”

I was greeted with the usual uproar of childish voices as I entered the invalid's room, and the first thing I saw on entering was the little girl jumping up and down in her mother's bed with a rat-terrier in her arms and her face as dirty as a pig. The next thing I noted was that the mother was better. Her face had relaxed from its tenseness and looked soft and girlish again. She smiled at me a little sheepishly, as I glanced from her to the obstreperous baby, who was acting like the old Nick and singing and screeching to her brother, whom she was romping with.

“Did n’t you send her with her aunt?” I asked, trying to assume a severity I was far from feeling after seeing the happy light on the mother’s face.

“No”—she faltered —“I just could n’t — I did n’t sleep at all last night, and at three o’clock I woke her father and asked him if I had to let her go. He said no, so I went to sleep — and here she is!”

Just then the father came in and spoke quite sternly to the little girl and told her to get right off the bed; but I stopped him. “No,” I said, “she’s got this young one now, and I hope she will just jump up and down on her till she flattens her entirely out.” The girl-mother laughed weakly, and when I left, both children and the pup were on the bed with her — but if you will believe it she is much better now and able to sit up.

Things are looking up here at Grouch Place, too (I knock on wood as I write it). The man of the house is better and I have caught up with my work a little and last night I went out to throw out the dish-water after dinner (we have n’t any sink, and this is a part of our trouble), and saw the new

moon squarely over my right shoulder and not through a tree either. As I write a few tentative snowflakes are falling. My jonquils, tulips, hyacinths, and daffodils are far above the ground — but I am not going to let this discourage me, but stick to the promise of the new moon.

## V

### ROUGH THOUGHTS FOR ROUGH WEATHER

I ASKED a farmer the other day which month in the year was hardest on man and beast and he replied: "March — March — March by long odds!" I noticed in his voice the grumbling note so common to our speech, so indicative of our inharmonious attitude toward life. March is a rough month in the country, and in a sense a discouraging season, but why should we growl about it when we know it is inevitable and that it has its uses in the plan of the year?

I have lived much alone, and in the quiet days when the children were away at school I formed the habit of making friends with the weather.

There are so many phases of what we stupidly consider the commonplace, which will become very dear to us if we allow them to but I believe women are especially mis-

taken in closing their hearts to the charm of the passing hour.

They have set their hearts on other things, and if they cannot have them they are at least going to have the pleasure of sulking about it — working dully ahead with compressed lips and grave faces, and stoically accepting the egregious doctrine that their portion is but a poor one compared with the good gifts which others have.

There is a big, joyous, hearty way of accepting what life brings you, but women have not been taught as men have that it is a disgrace to shirk. They seem to think it the proper thing to do, or finding shirking out of the question they are prone to settle down, to relinquish impressions of romance, renounce artistic instincts, and narrow themselves to what they call the practical. In this they hugely abuse the practical. A woman may be practical without losing the habits of mirth and laughter that made her girlhood so lovable.

Indeed, if she is thoroughly practical she will see that it is her own personality she should cultivate for her own sake, rather

than stupid economies and hard, morbid sacrifices by which she deliberately destroys much of her feminine grace and charm.

Men have a much better appreciation of the simple blessings of life than women have. They set the proper value upon the functions of the senses, upon good health and food and plain conjugal joys.

Women like to call this simple content with life—man's coarseness; but no, it is man's genius, his nearness to the workings of great Nature that makes him thus, and women would do well to cease their fretting after little worldly possessions and achievements, and acquire the habit of allowing life to be as dear to them as it wishes to be, and as it will be when they understand.

We are wont to say of the country woman who has never been out of her native state, and seldom seen a theatre or a street car, that she has seen little of life. I challenge this statement. I say that the woman who was born in a great city, educated in a woman's college, sent abroad in the conventional fashion and married suitably, at the proper time, has seen little of life. I say

that many such women live and die without seeing life or knowing in any sense what life is.

Society is not life. While its narrow round is sounding its brass and tinkling its cymbal, life is going fiercely on, down in the narrow street where we struggle for bread, out in the barn-yard where the feathered folk are stirring to spring industries and the patient beasts are waiting our demands.

Life is here in the kitchen, where the woman must, with consummate cleverness never be excelled by any art or accomplishment, minister to the bodily wants of a few of her fellow-creatures.

It is the woman who has walked across the fields on a wild winter night to help a sister woman in her hour of trial, the woman who has dressed the new-born baby and composed the limbs of the dead, learned the rude surgery of the farm, harnessed horses, milked cows, carried young lambs into the kitchen to save them from perishing in the rough March weather — it is she who has seen life.

My lot was cast on the ragged edge of a little Indiana town with the plain fields

and a fringe of flat woodland behind me, and the rural sights and sounds of the village not far away. We were very poor. The kitchen was my kingdom for many hours in the day, and there was not much outlook from its one window. I had not much learning. My education stopped short of a common-school course. I never had anything pretty to wear; our house was meagrely furnished. I was obliged to evolve for my children such garments as I could devise from the outworn raiments of their elders and such bargains as I could pick up at the village store. Many a time I have made a little petticoat from an old coat or an apron, from a discarded shirt, but in these cramping surroundings I was not at all unhappy, and I think the reason was because I loved beauty. Does this sound contradictory? I think I hear somebody say: "What! a woman who loves beauty condemned to live in a common place like that!"

Pardon me. Sometimes people who are great lovers of beauty are allowed to live in common places and find it, and this is so much better than having it brought and

laid at one's feet that I hope no one will underestimate my great privilege.

Somehow, amidst my heavy work and daily care and worry, I stumbled upon an impression of art. I have n't any idea that I got it right, but it has answered the purpose so well I hope nobody will tell me if I am wrong. I learned that art is simply a way of looking at things. And after that I never looked at a tree or a ragged meadow, or a gleam of cold March sunshine without a happy stirring of the heart that meant art to me.

I hope nobody will think that this is nonsense, for I am anxious that other women situated as I have been may yield to just such a mood, and let the March day as they see it from the kitchen window, whether it be a blustering day with snow flying, or a clear twilight with a hint of old-fashioned Easter flowers blooming and blessed robins hopping about, be to them a picture day; for life is short, dear woman, and at its end, in looking back, March days seem scarce enough!

Out here in the country where I live

March is a time of prophecy. One has only to step out upon the ground to feel the surprising and sense the relenting mood of the fierce season.

There are still a few sugar camps close to my home, though methods of sugar-making have changed and lost many of their picturesque qualities, and trees of any kind are fairly disappearing from the face of the earth. I always grieve when I see a dripping spout in a sugar-maple tree. It seems so like draining the heart of nature, but she yields her sweet sustenance like a loving mother, and doubtless pardons our ingratitude. Sugar-making, like all crude home industries, appeals with special interest to the children. What other reason can there be for children's quick response to Nature and the primitive than that their perception of the divine is still unspoiled by that world-knowledge which never brings us the joy we felt in the life-knowledge we learned in the good old-fashioned days and ways?

Children so dearly love to see us taking hold of life in the big work which country

people do. They like to go with us to fix shelter for the lambs to which the March wind is not tempered. They like to see us "set" the hens, and their delight knows no bounds when we "take off" a brood of little chickens or bring part of them into the house, to keep them in a basket near the fire if the cold day makes the eggs slow in hatching. They are wild with joy if a rare day comes in which we may "spade up" a bed for early garden.

Have you ever thought how the tenderest language of Jesus always has reference to some simple thing that will fix the attention of a child?—to the hen and her chickens, the straying sheep, to hunger and thirst, to Martha with her housekeeping.

To be sure these utterances only reflect the environment of Jesus, but is it not strange that in a Christian land which claims the life of Jesus as the foundation of its civilisation, the farmer should be held in ridicule, his wife pitied because she lives away from "life"!

I have noticed that women who talk and write about plain, daily life almost invariably endeavour to idealise it too much.

This is the true feminine instinct. Women like to trim things up. They will put a petticoat on the lamp-shade and a sash on the door-knob if they get half a chance. Women can seldom dissociate the idea of beauty from fabric, and are always a little at a loss to separate the truly artistic from the merely dainty. It is this instinct that troubles the woman of refined sensibilities when she finds herself confronted by work which she thinks is degrading, or by a plain life which seems bereft of the "beautiful things" she imagines are satisfying to woman's nature.

There is no proof that a longing for "beautiful things" is an indication in itself of a refined nature, or that being happy and satisfied in common surroundings bespeaks cheap taste. It is difficult to decide what is really cheap. I have seen the holy halo of motherhood shining about the face of a young woman rocking her new baby in a little, ugly, imitation cherry-wood chair, and I have seen real rosewood and mahogany furniture in homes where the atmosphere was worse than cheap.

One lesson that women in all grades of society need most to learn is that of moderation. They need to practise the medium gait. The woman in the kitchen needs to learn that sleight-of-hand by which she may shove her work out of the way and make room for a variety of interests. There is a fine spiritual energy that we may put into living, and that enables us to accomplish our tasks with the master hand.

Women need to learn to ignore petty and narrow perfections, to get the effect without the detail, to save the force some women expend on morbid scrubbing and scouring and apply it in bringing entertainment and enlightenment, and good, old-fashioned fun into the household. Most good women are too conscientious, and I have known "earnest" women to drive people to drink.

I despise bad housekeeping, and so many "bright" women are bad housekeepers. They think they are great enough to live above unwashed dishes and untidy rooms. I hope never to attain this pinnacle of greatness, but I do wish my sisters would abolish standards of painful excellence with their

consequent worry and nagging for an unvarying standard of cheerfulness and humorous treatment of daily mistakes and bits of "bad luck" that one might quite as well laugh as cry over.

I have been looking about for some bit of old-fashioned March lore to tell you — but can find nothing but the cat story. We take account of cats and dogs in the country, because they, too, are the people we live with.

I went some years ago to visit at a lonely house far in the wooded hills, and as I entered the room an enormous cat rose up from a big rocking-chair by the fire, and, stretching himself, yawned majestically. I thought it was a young tiger, but my hostess explained that it was only a March cat.

She said that kittens seldom arrive at this vale of tears in the month of March, and that when they do they always grow to immense size. She further assured me that March is a fortuitous birth-month, and that men born in March are sure to be virile and ambitious.

I was not convinced that this was true

either of men or cats, but some years later I went one day to see a woman who was weaving a carpet for me. In the loom-room I found, reposing on a heap of carpet rag balls, a huge cat fairly rivaling that other one. I asked the woman if she "raised" the cat, and when she said she did I inquired what month he was born in. After thinking and calling up contemporary incidents she informed me that he was born in March.

I relate this as a warning to any overburdened sister who may be nervously on the lookout for the "last straw."

She may be feeling herself fairly "mired down" in March mud. There is no use trying to idealise the mud which the men and children "track in" this time of year.

She may be fairly itching to clean house, and prevented from doing so by having to smoke meat and set hens and cook for a big family and a "hand."

She may be feeling dismayed over the number of mouths there are to feed, with so many live things around and more constantly arriving at this prolific time of year. Possibly she may be bringing the "runt pig"

up by hand to get a little "money of her own." But if the faithful tabby, with seeming lack of good judgment, should add to the family at this inconvenient season, do not, with an exalted idea of grasping the world with a strong hand, drown the kittens before the children find them, for you will be destroying fine specimens of cathood and interfering with the doctrine of the survival of the fit.

## VI

### PHILOSOPHIES OF A HOUSECLEANING DAY

I LIKE to "talk about cats and things" and think it no disgrace to exchange recipes and discuss housekeeping methods, but the "smart" woman of modern times has looked with contempt upon such common conversation — thinking we should discuss more vital topics. This is surely from misapprehension of the word — she must have forgotten what "vital statistics" are.

I wish I knew what it is that they want, these women who constantly express in such impassioned strain their discontent with life, but more, I wish that they themselves knew. Only the suffragists state it definitely. They want equal rights with man. I am not an anti-suffragist or anti anything else — I am merely setting down impressions as they come to me uninfluenced by much that affects the trend of thought of most women

writers, but it is impossible for me to believe that the franchise would do other than complicate the "woman question." The Civil War did not solve the "Negro problem."

But then, I only know how the franchise would affect me. If an angel with a flaming sword should appear before me this minute and say, "You are free, you may vote, you are a citizen," it would not change one feature of my life. I should have to get up and get breakfast in the morning and go on with my housecleaning just the same.

That I had an even chance with man in the business world would not bring me business ability. My arms would not be stronger to strike with the hammer nor my legs more sturdy to follow the plough. I should still be subject to every limitation of sex.

The business woman who complains to me that women are not well paid for their work would not have her craft more at her finger-tips for equal rights.

The majority of women do not know what it means to work as men work, steadily, moment by moment. They drudge, and

allow a sense of bodily degradation in doing it to pull them down and break their spirit, but they do not in the least understand what physical and mental force must be expended in the mastery of a trade or a profession. Very few women are fit for this concentrated application. It is not a "fair chance" that women need to make them the equals of man in this sense; it is bone and sinew and reserve force in brain and nerve cells.

Not that woman is a sickly creature, or even a weak one, but she is not "built" to be man's rival in the business or professional world. I believe this with all my heart, and also I believe that she is peculiarly fitted for the varied activities of plain home life.

As to the injustice of our laws as they pertain to the personal and property rights of women, here again I am at sea. When it comes to a woman's standing on her legal rights as opposed to her husband, or to squabbling over the children born of their union, the worst has already happened, and there is scarcely a dignified way of settling the trouble.

I like to believe that most people are sane and healthful in spirit, and I shrink from the details of domestic infelicity which loose divorce laws encourage, sensational newspapers promulgate, and careless moral sentiment is responsible for. Women talk too much of these things. If men talked more we might have a revelation as to what many of them have to endure from sordid wives who insist on being "kept" like lilies of the field, who refuse to rear families, and rebel against the responsibilities of housekeeping.

While I sympathise deeply with the trials of my sex and know that many of us bear them nobly, I am convinced that women are often unreasonable in their demands upon men's time, patience, love, and pocket-book. I know it is an accepted idea that men have everything their own way; that they slight and neglect their wives, and that women are powerless to retaliate. But much of this is exaggerated by women's morbid brains.

Women are fed on morbid mental diet almost from the cradle. Fiction, which women and girls read omnivorously, is

largely morbid. Religion as dispensed by sentimentalists is morbid. We are fairly swamped in morbid health-fads, and women let their minds run on imaginary ills, accepting the ridiculous idea that we are a race of invalids. The truth is, Nature takes good care of the mothers of her race, and, when not interfered with, she manages finely. I hope we may hear less complaining, less abominable testimony, less damaging admission of wrong living, and that women will get back to the normal and to eternal truth that can never be changed by any agitation of popular sentiment, will get over the idea that there will come a time when men will "understand"; it is woman who needs to understand.

Woman achieves her nearest equality with man when she is simply and healthfully alive and at work in her natural sphere, when she is not striving for recognition or whining for appreciation. "The king is but a man as I am — the violet smells to him as it does to me!" So, man is but a creature who lives and loves and dies. He breathes with pleasure the fresh air of the

early spring, drinks clear water, smells the upturned sod, knows the delight of sleep and the taste of bread — am I not the same? But I am more. God has atoned to me for all the weakness of my nature; He has given me fulfilment where man has ever but an exquisite longing. He has given me the child, the warm nearness of its little head upon my heart, the blessed weight of its body in my arms. It is this human nearness, this mutual feeling for life, that makes man and woman one and obliterates all questions of equality, and in this simplicity of being we deeply sense the existence of purpose in all that we do and bear.

We country people are especially blessed with this nearness. Life is simple and its duties are plain, yet many of us do not know that this is a blessing. We look away to the city and sigh for its luxury and elegance, not realising that we are the people who live close to the great secret which the world so often "stands tiptoe to explain."

Did you ever try being happy just because it was raining or snowing or blowing, or because it was April or May or November?

Any of these is sufficient reasons for being happy, but few people know it. Indeed, young people are discouraged by ambitious parents and teachers from yielding to moods of being happy over nothing, and counselled to strive and grasp and attain and accumulate, forgetting everything but the work in hand. Men in hot, dusty offices and stores and counting-rooms must indeed do this, but women, more blessed in their work at home, may keep close around them a sense of what the beautiful world is doing, and share in the impressionistic rapture with which April clothes the faintly greening woods in mists, hastily splotches the grass with dandelions and streaks the colour on startled tulip petals scarcely awake and aware.

I used to have a friend come from the city to visit me. She would sit in the kitchen while I worked and lament over my hard lot, and the fact that I was buried in this little backwoods town. "Youth and beauty are so precious, and talent so rare," she used to say. "It is an outrage for yours to be sacrificed working for a man and children." She would often get me worked up into such

a state of self-pity I wonder I did not commit some dreadful folly, for I was young and had not yet learned the deep meanings of life. But she was wrong in every premise. Youth and beauty are not precious, neither is talent rare. The years are merciless to us all, and I think, the "well-preserved" woman of forty with her massaged face and juvenile costume looks her years more painfully than the sweet country mother with life's dear story written on her strong, quiet face.

My friend was a good woman and her sympathy was genuine, but she did not know what she wished for me and had nothing to offer me but the pernicious seed of discontent. Do not allow what people of this sort tell you of the glories of the "outside world" to distress you. There is no outside world. Life is life, and the world is your world.

The woman who is cleaning house on an April day is so fatally prone to allow her happiness to depend upon other people and upon circumstances judged by other people's standards. This is a little way of looking at life. Suppose your house is old and plain

and its furnishings shabby as compared with your neighbour's. Does not April love you just as well — is not her face quite as tremulously tender, do not her robins sing their world-old love song at twilight, and is it not for you?

Step out into the April night some time when you are perplexed by life's problems, and see the stars hanging down from the sky. Feel the fresh tides of the year throbbing, half-hear the stirrings of sprouting things and the nestlings of young creatures to sleep and mother. Imbibe the trust in which they go to rest, and take the gift which life is constantly offering you. If you ask me what that gift is I reply that it is a soul quickened with a willingness to live and trained to the proud humility of obedience which takes rank with command.

In trying to tell women of a serenity that may come into their lives if they will only admit it, I do not mean that they can arrive at a point where everything will move so smoothly that there will be no friction. Too many impractical writers have told women this. It is easy to put on paper a

plan for smooth, perfect action in the home and kitchen. But we who have lived there year in and year out know better. We know that the dishes will not wash themselves while we go out to drop corn or plant potatoes or sow early garden seeds. The little garment we left on the sewing-machine when we got up to cook dinner will be there when we return, and if the bread runs over the pan while we are out making a bed for sweet peas it will be too light and have big holes in it — or if we “work it down” it may taste sour when it rises again. I believe the thing which most frets the woman in the kitchen is the idea that many of her sisters live without care and worry while she must degrade herself with toil. If this were true we should still be the fortunate ones; but it is a great mistake. Life does not move without effort for any really bright people; friction keeps us alive, and the woman whom you see idly sitting around is a dull person whom you should not envy.

One great cause of the unrest among women is the idleness enforced upon many of them by riches. They take up foolish,

baseless causes just to have something to do. I visited a rich woman not long ago and watched her lounging about in the morning while an overworked maid was hurrying through the rooms striving to get things straightened up. My fingers fairly itched to help her, and I saw so much the mistress of the house might have done with pleasure and profit to herself and her digestion, and with great benefit to her home and relief to the harassed maid.

Perhaps what these women who write to me of longings and ambitions unsatisfied need to do is to cultivate appreciation. Whatever we really appreciate is ours. It is a possession nobody can take from us. We need to look at life in the abstract as a thing of wonder and beauty.

We must learn to regard suffering and trial through the sublimity of what they bring with them: courage, patience, endurance. We must learn to see death through the beauty of renunciation, classic as the marbles and cypress trees that typify it.

As for happiness, it, too, is symbolical. It belongs to us exactly in proportion to our

appreciation of it. People who know what happiness is are happy. Only those who do not understand remain fretting like foolish children.

I am persuaded that much of woman's "unquietness" comes from wrong thinking about marriage. I look with much disfavour on our modern hesitation over the "advisability" of marriage. This foolish and immoral attitude is part of the "woman question"—and woman is responsible for it. Middle-aged women who think they are "sensible" constantly remind young women to look ahead and see what the man can give them of "the good things of life." This coarse expression embraces the cut-glass, sterling silver, finery of all sorts, uselessly shod feet, fine white hands and general elegance which young women are taught they must have. This attitude on the part of womankind, more than any other thing, is responsible for Old-World immoralities which are said to be growing in our great cities with shocking rapidity.

I am glad that I live out in the big world of spring, where I can see the farmers break-

ing ground and feel the deep religion of such vital work. Men go daily into avenues of money-making with a sense of dishonesty in their hearts, but the ploughman can never doubt he is doing "God's service" when he plants the seed for bread.

I am glad to work in the exquisite light of the April morning — glad when a dainty little shower comes lilting across the meadows, driving us all in from our planting, and pelting the bowed heads of the tulips and jonquils—glad when the thunder rolls along the distant hills and the sun flashes out again and life and the day's work are before me.

## VII

### THE SIMPLE LIFE

THE simple life is typified in my early recollections by a washing-day at grandmother's. There was a pungent odor of cleanliness about the place exhaling from the lye-soap in the big gourd, and the walk from the kitchen door to the milkhouse was scoured to a rich cream colour. The cinnamon rose-bush was in bloom, and the dazzling whiteness of the clothes on the line as they flapped against the deep blue sky, together with the long stretch of green, green grass that felt so good to one's bare feet, made a combination of vivid colouring that hurt the eyes and made one wish to look away across the orchard, where there was a soft pink and white mist, to the woods, traced delicately in their early verdure.

Grandmother resting on the bench under the big sycamore tree, her arms bare and

her hands pink and crinkled from long immersion in the suds, took me on her knee and told me about the laurel that must be blooming in the mountains far away where her old home was. She said that no flower that blooms out here in this strange country can ever be so pretty as the mountain laurel, not even the cinnamon rose which I admired so much, or the May pinks down in the garden, freshly uncovered from their winter sleep and mingling their perfume with the scent of upturned earth from the garden beds and cool, new paths, where it was an awesome delight to go pattering at twilight. The garden was a new world rediscovered, and all through the summer it would have its moods for us — its remoteness of sweet corn and pole-beans, its aristocratic retirements of sage and musk geranium and lavender, and far in one corner its melancholy patch of hemp which grandmother raised, partly for seed for the canary, partly to remind her of the hempfields she used to know in Old Virginia.

The big, gray farmhouse was sweet from top to bottom with the rejuvenation of spring.

The girthing-striped rag carpet which grandmother had woven was freshly laid over clean straw on the sitting-room floor. The sprigged muslin curtains at the parlour windows were beautifully laundered; the quilts had all been upon the line, washed or aired as was needed. They made a goodly array, filling up every available inch of line and running over upon the garden paling. Those on the paling were decidedly below the salt, plebeian nine-patch or four-patch. The aristocrats on the line had nothing to do with them. There was the Whig rose, the star pattern, the Irish chain, the ocean wave, the log-cabin and other patterns whose names I have forgotten, besides the "tufted" counterpanes and the spreads that great-grandmother had woven.

Grandmother must have been very tired indeed that day, but she did not say so; she only told me about the laurel, and I remembered it.

I think it was from the blood of Old Virginia that I inherited the crude feeling for life that has been such a treasure to me through years which some people might call hard.

Among the people of my blood who lived amid the green hills and blue mountains of the Shenandoah Valley there flourished the true type of the simple life. Charles Wagner failed to elucidate the simple life to the mind of the wayfaring man. The Scripture, as usual, hits the mark when it insinuates that the wayfaring man is likely to be a fool. He is, and his manner of "faring" does n't indicate anything. He may be tramping, or riding in his automobile or his private car.

These valley people lived very heartily to the day and hour. They relished life. They were not trying to do anything but live. The old walls that had sheltered their ancestors were devoid of ornament, the bare floors were polished by the feet of generations, the staunch old furniture was mellow with the tones of age. Fires in huge chimneys were dully smouldering or springing to welcome beckonings at nightfall. There was no effort toward elegance. The people were the home. If you have ever known the air of such a place, style and interior decoration will always seem cheap to you. It was what they lacked that made them fine.

I hope the reader will not take this as an epigram. I detest epigrams, and they have been so fashionable of late years. Our popular fiction has bristled with the covert immorality of smart sayings.

When I say that it is what we lack that makes us fine I mean that Life stands ever ready with her compensations for all of our losses.

I love that stanza of Mrs. Browning's

In the pleasant orchard-closes  
"God bless all our gains!" say we;  
But, "May God bless all our losses!"  
Better suits with our degree.

From these simple-hearted people, who lived so close to "wind and sun and summer rain," I inherited God's best blessing for all our losses — a keen taste for living.

It was on a fourteenth of May — I remember the plum-tree was in bloom, and the moonlight flooded our little village dooryard — when the boy and I vowed to marry as soon as we were rich enough. Later we decided to do it anyway and not wait to be rich enough. It was a dreadful mistake, as we found out later when there were some

children with nobody but us to look after them. Man remains a child long after woman has come to a realising sense of duty. My young husband — a Tom Sawyer village lad — had little taste for the ties of domesticity.

There are two distinct kinds of men: domestic men and the other kind. The latter are pretty sure to be attractive to girls. They are likely to ride horses and carry guns and have dogs following them.

I always wondered what became of the girl who ran away with Young Lochinvar. I warrant the quiet fellow who stood awkwardly by and let his bride be carried away would have made the better husband. "A laggard in love and a dastard in war" is sure to be a good hand to do up the chores and dry the dishes and stay at home evenings. He will go to church with his wife, and set the hens, and run the clothes through the wringer, and read aloud from the farm paper while she fashions garments for the little ones from the worn-out raiment of their elders. This is the domestic kind.

At the risk of seeming unduly personal

I may remark that my life-partner was the other kind. He was a sportsman, a man of the streets and town, a man's man in every sense of the word — and I was a mother, a child in years, but I had a world to make for my children, a castle to build — and how was I to build it unless I learned to make bricks without straw?

In foregoing chapters I have spoken to women of the duty and pleasure of work; let me now remind them of the pleasure and duty of idleness. If I had not known how to loaf and when to be a vagabond I should have fallen by the wayside, or have grown old and hard-featured and bitter, with no relish for life and no heart for song and story.

I know that city people believe they have all the advantages, but I am sure that country-town people are the lords of the earth when it comes to good living.

No matter how poor we are, we are always in reach of luxuries. A clear fire, a fresh egg, a pitcher of sweet milk or of pure water — these may seem very unimportant things to the woman who wishes to broaden her life by moving to a city, but you narrow your

life immensely when you dispense with anything sweet and natural that goes to sustain it.

My instincts were sharpened to the bodily needs of my children. I was like a tiger-mother when she says to Life: "Give me something for those little cubs!" And I got it, because Life always obeys when you speak to her like that.

But there was so much more besides food to be found for them. There was beauty and the joy of living, and the charm of world lore, and the realm of the imaginary. Many mothers more fortunately situated than I was cannot find time to convey these things to their children. They have too many "interests."

I did heartily covet the grille-work and draperies that adorned my friends' houses, but while they were busy cleaning them I found time to lie on the old faded lounge in our little library and read Shakespeare or Poe, or go roaming off with the children to hunt spring flowers.

We were always too poor to keep a horse, but we kept one. You are up in the world

when you own a horse, and if you have a dog you are sure of at least one faithful henchman for retinue. My children and I with our horse and dog made many triumphal pilgrimages through the world of May. I think our rank in the court of spring was fairly high, at least we never found any lack of welcome there, and always came home garlanded and loaded with favours.

My friends thought I was atoning for my mistakes by making more. They thought I was not diligent enough and was inculcating in my children habits of idleness.

Many of my friends had no children and were fairly insolent in their triumph over it, but they know now that I lived in the sunshine of life while they toiled dully in the shadow.

I wish I could impress upon women some understanding of the value of many things they are taught to discard. The great trouble with women is that they are all trying to follow the same lifeless model. In their passion for refinement they lose the very essence of life; and in doing so they often fling man back upon immorality, in his

natural seeking for the primitive. Man instinctively reaches out for the primal mate — and too often she is not there.

I heartily pity women who have lived in the narrow groove of ladyhood. Some people may consider me coarse. It is true, my hands are not nice and I do laugh heartily, and perhaps I do not “appear” quite well in fashionable society; but I believe the word coarse is as often misused as any in the language. It seems to me that nothing coarsens a woman like luxury.

Some months ago I was dining at a fashionable hotel in a city when a couple entered the room and sat down at an adjoining table. They were people who “lived” at the hotel. I saw at once that they belonged to the “fortunate” class — one could tell by the cut of their clothes, the diamond rings that fairly stiffened the woman’s pudgy fingers, the man’s air of deadly boredom, and the woman’s hostile countenance. She bestowed a casual ferocity on my old-fashioned sleeves out of the supply of scorn she seemed to carry on hand. The puffy circles under her eyes and the unwholesome stoutness

of her figure betokened the stupid ease of the woman who "does n't have to work."

There was some terrapin on the bill-of-fare — I think it was not genuine — and the couple discussed its merits in the dead-alive fashion common to the rich man and his wife, who are astute with the fashionable necessity of expurgating from their conversation any hint of originality or possible interest.

I did wish I could tell them about the time I killed the turtle, and how much better it was than what they were eating.

My husband has a habit of bringing home his minnow bucket and leaving it on the back porch for me to explore after supper is over and he has flown to town with his cheerful freedom from domestic cares. Whatever I find there is mine to do as I like with, be it an eel, a bullfrog, or a mess of pretty black bass. Many a spring evening has found me in the back lot taking the scales off the fish while the children danced about in semi-savage glee and the cats contested claims for the heads. This time it was a great big turtle — and it was alive. I shut the children and cats up in the kitchen and

gave my undivided attention to the turtle, for I had never dressed one before.

The fat woman with the rings would have fainted dead away if she had seen me dispatch that turtle and split its shell open with the hatchet. But I knew how real terrapin tasted and she did not, and as I observed her I suddenly knew that there were such a lot of things that I knew which she did not, and I was glad of it!

In reviewing a period of my life which is closed now, since the children are gone away, I am conscious of a distinct charm in the living of it, with all its hardships and heart-aches.

I believe I can tell women what that charm was and that they may profit by it. It was variety. Whenever it was possible I submitted to the mood. I kept up an armed neutrality with Duty and never allowed her to get the better of me. I never followed anybody's lead. I lived my own life. If I wished to ride a horse, or to play a game of cards, or to go wading in the creek with the children, I always did it.

I never strained my eyesight or racked

my nerves trying to arrive at small perfections. I avoided rivalries and emulations. In short, I lived.

The other evening the boy — he is forty-eight years old now and has scarcely a wrinkle on his face — hung up his hat and coat and sat down to spend the evening at home. It was chilly and I had started a little fire on the hearth. We looked at each other, and the tears sprang up in our eyes because the children are gone — and because ——

I felt like quoting these lines to him — but I did n't:

When all the world is old lad,  
And all the trees are brown;  
And all the sport is stale, lad,  
And all the wheels run down:  
Creep home, and take your place there,  
The spent and maimed among:  
God grant you find one face there  
You loved when all was young.

## VIII

### THE MARRIAGE QUESTION

**M**Y FAVOURITE month for weddings is April, though June or any other season will do if the couple who are marrying love each other, and the kinsfolk have "nothin' at all to say." There is a tender light in the April world, more typical of the delicate intimacy of souls, which is the true nearness of the married state, than the passion and joyousness of June. [Passion and joyousness are transient emotions, but tenderness and affection survive the shocks of trouble and misfortune, and the slow wearing of inevitable years.]

I was married in December, but June would have been fine for me, because I was a summer girl, and looked my best on a hot day. What I suffered in winter from a red nose, purple cheeks, rough skin, and stiff unmanageable hair, was made up to

me in hot weather by little perspiration, curls around my face, a complexion that did not freckle or tan, and a general sensation of revelling in warmth and sunshine. Yes, I should have made a fine June bride—but this is a contrary world.

A wedding was a simpler and, I believe, a happier thing in those days: two or three new frocks and a modest housekeeping outfit. One really pities the children of the rich who are so surfeited with presents and finery as to have utterly lost interest in them.

Shall we ever learn, do you think, that few possessions are best, and that the poor are the only people who have treasures? Shall we know some time that precarious shelter and some uncertainty as to food and raiment bring us close to God because we must trust Him like the birds which “without barn or storehouse are fed”?

I know the modern bride, with her absurd array of gifts, making the house look like an auctioneer’s room or a fancy store in a city, might well envy my delight in the family Bible, the one set of silver spoons, the porcelain “teaset,” the simple table linen,

the twenty-five precious gold dollars "from the groom's father," and the gay bed comforter padded with lamb's wool, washed and "carded" by her own hands, which Aunt Margaret quilted for me. You have to "quilt" a wool comforter, because the wool slips out of place if you merely "tack" it as you do one made with cotton.

Gifts lose their value when they have no suggestion of utility, and the beginning of married life loses half its charm without the sense of embarkation on a risky venture that comes to a young couple that know that there are immense difficulties to encounter in the immediate future.

I am afraid there is a lack of real virility in the rising generation. The college athlete and the golf and basket-ball girl seem to contradict this opinion; but some way the spirit and verve of these young people appear to be perfunctory and they never seem to get down to the real business of life with genuine earnestness. There is through it all a holding to the "swell thing"—to a sort of smartness that demands a money backing—a dependence upon a "good start" which

we used, in the old days, to scorn waiting for. This is one of the great evils of society — the extravagant basis which young folks believe they must begin life on. The idea of caution naturally takes hold on the minds of the very class which should marry and populate the earth, and has little weight with the class that should not. The result is a falling off of population in the thinking, conscientious class — the people who wish to be sure they are right before going ahead.

Business and social conditions are largely responsible for this state of affairs. Young men see that the chances for rising to real independence are very few. They realise that their lifetime must be spent under an employer; there is not the old-time inspiration of “starting out for yourself” which gave such delightful stimulus to the day’s work when husband and wife were pulling hard together toward the longed-for goal of independence. Few people realise the intense artistic passion of the day’s work, or know that it, not achievement, is the crowning glory of success.

I doubt if there is a self-made man living

to-day who would not gladly barter his millions and all his remaining days of stale success for just one year of the old times with his young wife and the blessed babies whose helplessness made life so much more perilous and sweet.

I am no misanthrope bemoaning the evils of the times. I know there is nothing to be gained by that, but it is a pity that the big business has swallowed up the little ones, as the flat and the family hotel are swallowing up the home. All you who have a home, no matter how modest — with just a bit of yard and garden to call your own, room to walk about and watch the children play, and to potter around at gardening and horticulture or poultry-raising — try to bear in mind how you are blessed in this individuality of living above those who are crowded between the high, heartless walls of the city.

But there is no saying truer than that trite one, the home's where the heart is; so home can be adjusted to changing conditions and its sweet essence preserved no matter if we are doomed to "work on a salary" and live in a side street.

I like the side streets, and in my infrequent visits to the city I find more happiness there than in the more fashionable dwellings.

I hate to think or talk a great deal about the evils of society. I believe it does little real good; but a certain class of women seem to glory in the unpleasant details of popular immorality and to find in them a justification for their cynical attitude toward what they like to call "the marriage question." They will not hesitate to tell you that they are "opposed" to marriage, seeming not in the least to realise that such an attitude is very damaging and reflects upon themselves.

When a wealthy city woman said to me recently that she was decidedly opposed to marriage I replied indignantly: "How dare you say so? You might quite as well say you are opposed to life!"

She smiled sardonically. "My dear," she said, "you know little about life," and then proceeded to detail vile things to me till my cheeks burned hot and I wished I could "cut" the reception she was having that afternoon and run home — home to my shabby old sitting-room and the quiet domes-

ticity of the neighbours — the sane blessedness of my country town, where I might, amidst toil and sacrifice, cherish the beautiful ideals of life that help one over the rough places and keep one's heart young even to old age.

I believe this acute sophistication — this world-knowledge women have been so anxious to acquire — has cheapened them immeasurably. Hostility toward immortality is a poor weapon compared with that larger means of warfare which ignores much and persistently upholds the ideal to the rising generation.

I asked my friend what she proposed to have her girls do, since she did not wish them to marry. She replied that their father could give them the luxuries their position demanded, and that there was music and art, and literature and society, and club and church work, and travel, more than to fill up their lives. I saw then, that the woman had lost the precious savour of life and was acutally content with the barren ideal that places material things before the mysterious, intangible mood for living that makes young

people, and some old people if they be very wise, so irrationally happy. Her husband was a millionaire, but I did not envy her or him.

I am hoping that there are not a great many women who believe as she does. It is a pet idea of mine that the great majority of married couples love each other. Maybe it is n't "smart" to think this, but I do think it, sensational newspapers, putrid fiction and the divorce docket to the contrary notwithstanding.

Few people are gifted with real instincts of propriety regarding vital things. There should be in every human mind the instinct to preserve the ideal of love. Unfortunate personal experiences should never lead us to discredit love itself.

People are vastly ignorant regarding the mating instinct and the holiness of it, and this is due to wrong teaching and the promulgation of light sentiment in ribald stories, cheap songs, sensational plays and immoral epigrams. These are nauseating to the quiet thinker who understands some rudiments of God's purpose.

Our children need a plainer guidance along the simple truths of life. Women are to blame for so much that is wrong in the world it seems a pity to charge them with anything more, but I do arraign them on the charge of being unduly sordid and "sensible." I charge them with over-educating their daughters, over-refining them and giving them huge overdoses of culture. I am not very fond of culture. I like naturalness so much better.

I heard a woman say the other day: "Oh, that is the way with a girl — taking a fancy to some nobody when a nice fellow with money wants to marry her." I happened to know that the "nice fellow with money" was undersized and decidedly lacking in the upper story. I have not seen the "nobody." The speaker was not consciously immoral. In her creed the money made the little automaton a "nice fellow." If she had only glanced back she might have seen that his parents married "sensibly" with a view to joining two fortunes, and that this was the probable reason for his physical deficiency.

If the "nobody" whom the girl fancied

was a man — and he probably was — had anybody a right to ask her to renounce him, and the prospect of being the mother of happy, hearty children, for the goods and gear the rich man could bestow? Was the woman conscious, do you think, of what she was really asking the girl to do?

But women have lost the real refinement of sentiment in the false refinement of their education, just as they often lose their conception of the really artistic in what is actually morbid and degenerate.

They have set up an ideal of ladyhood as the thing to worship rather than the true type of womanhood, and they have tried to forget about the children and our duty to them while they are yet unborn. Deliver us from the spindle-legged offspring of the effete; give us rather the crude progeny of the middle class — they, at least, have possibilities.

It has been a very popular idea in recent years that we must discourage romance and teach our children wisdom. It is very necessary to discourage romance, but the discourager must have a fine eye for distinctions.

Very young girls are likely to get into serious trouble through romance, and it surely is the duty of parents and guardians to keep them from finding heroes on the street corners, but I am persuaded we take wrong methods of preparing our daughters for the disillusion of marriage. We tell a girl that it is wise to choose a well-to-do husband, as the pretty things he can give her will console her for any coldness after the honeymoon. Is this not a coarse sentiment?

How much better it would be to talk wisely to the girl of the nature and purpose of the married state, and warn her of the fatal danger of allowing petty things and foolish, unworthy ambitions to interfere with the plain, unsentimental human attraction of man and woman that is to hold them together.

It is very fortunate when married lovers are surrounded by the comforts of life, which help us so over the rough places, but passionate human-love has always in it a strong element of the sacrificial. Our lovers should take the joy of their union as a gratuity and the pain of it as the strongest tie that binds them.

When we have smiled into each other's eyes in divine happiness we are betrothed, but when we have wept in each other's arms in the first misery of our disillusion we are married, and standing at the doors of life. Let no man put us asunder.

I sometimes feel disgusted with the extravagance and display of the modern fashionable marriage, but I should be less than womanly if I did not like some fuss and feathers; so, like all women and most good men, I like a pretty wedding, but it must be a love match, and there must be a shower and a trousseau and a dear little house-keeping outfit.

I am glad that I do, and that I always cry when they say, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death us do part" — but they are not sorry tears.

I am tenderly in love with all brides — and particularly such as are having plain little weddings. Just as the naïve little wild flower at the old oak's knee is infinitely sweeter and more gifted with spirit than any hothouse rose, so your little wedding has a delicate charm that is smothered in the

elaborate details of the rich and extravagant wedding — though both couples may love and love sincerely. One thing for these young people to remember is that the childless marriage, if it be deliberately so, is an unholy union; not that the mere production of a large family always makes the union more so. I wish that all the children that populate the earth were born in holy matrimony. But this can only be when parents are peculiarly blessed with understanding — or when the mother is quickened with the divine instinct that brought the halo around the face of Mother Mary.

Happily, for us all, motherhood more than any other experience of life endows us with the divine, and all the false wisdom of the times cannot outweigh the priceless knowledge of Nature, which we so often seek to turn aside.

The best thing about a marriage is the founding of a new home. A real home is God's best gift to man, after the essentials of health and the functions of the senses. Can we not rear our children with more feeling for home life and less ambition for

figuring in the eyes of their social world? Can we not teach them that the great people of the earth are those who are living their own lives, little disturbed or flattered by the neglect or attention of society, and finding their best happiness in the home circle.

Let our children marry with the proper ideal of all that home implies — father, mother, brothers, and sisters, life's simple story briefly told, but never lacking in charm for those who are awake and aware.

## IX

### SOME NEEDS OF WOMAN

SOMETIMES I have a homesick day that almost brings me to that "incorporate silence" that Poe tells us about. Not that I know what he means by it — for I do not, except that it is a scare so fearful that there are no words for it. Death is a mere bagatelle beside it — it is something that partakes in no sense of the gentle finality of death. Maybe it walks past you half seen, half heard in the busy street as it did past me yesterday with hurried, muffled "pit-pat" and ghastly blind cognisance, brushing a tentative, formless feeler toward your heart, like a groping thing in the dark and almost making you shriek out and get yourself, without the least premeditation, into an insanity inquest. I think this thing which passes me thus, with insolent claim upon recognition is the wraith of a gray

existence, joyless, loveless, mirthless, stretching out year after year like a dull road between flat, dismantled cornfields on a sunless November afternoon. I have known happiness, reader, charm, gaiety, absorption, companionship, motherhood, home! But what if there are some who live in a constant atmosphere of my occasional homesick days? But this would be impossible. The suicide rate would increase with alarming rapidity and population would dwindle among a certain class of people. When we fall victims to this homesickness that home and "the folks" cannot cure (thank God, it comes seldom enough!) it is well to get on the train and go where people browse in dingy places with the "lean goat of shabby gentility," which some modern writer used as a figure of speech.

It seems a somewhat ignoble thing, this curing one's affliction by the sight of other people's misery, but a day of cheap living in the city generally sends me flying home like a bird to its nest warm with a sense of cosiness, of quiet and peace which is the great essential of my life. True, I can no longer

lay my head upon mother's knees and feel her magnetic hands wandering in blissful, soothing upon my hair. True, the man of the house does not understand, and fretfully states that he is n't feeling very well himself; true, the maid is sure to remind me that the potatoes are out, and my daughter to ask me when I am going to see about her new hat; true the patched place in the wall-paper which I mean to cover with a sectional bookcase when I can afford it, will stare at me, and the worn carpet which I have allowed a whole generation of young folks to dance upon for years, will show its teeth hideously, but there is something that never fails to respond with rapturous greeting when I run for refuge from the crowded store, the vapid street, the public eating place, and when the door of home closes upon me it shuts out this gaunt terror with which it seems to me many women live on terms of daily intimacy.

Sometimes my heart trembles a little at the thought. "Will my life ever be gray? Shall I ever be shut between gloomy brick walls fighting the city's dinginess by means of a cheap white curtain and a pot plant

languishing upon the window sill? Will the sound of laughter and happy voices ever come to me only as an echo like the shiver of broken glass in a silent house?" This is hypochondria and I do not often succumb to it, but when I do I know that home is the first essential of a woman's life

I saw an article in a magazine entitled "The Passing of the Home." It seemed to me a blasphemy, but it was only an epigram such as we have run to with foolish exaggeration in late years. Smart sayings are very fashionable and we allow them to be startling—it gives us a pleasant sensation of the nerves—we forget how much immoral sentiment is peddled about in this way. The funny man must have his joke, even if it be at the expense of our most sacred ideals of God's evident purposes in thus organising a world.

If home is not an essential in a woman's life there is something wrong with her, and if love is not necessary to her I believe I do not wish to make her acquaintance. It is perhaps not quite fair for a woman who has lived a full life to write about the needs of

women. What may we know of people's needs when we have so many things which thousands of people have not? I have said that a white curtain is a need of my life and that it makes me a better woman to see freshly laundered curtains at my windows, but perhaps I am wrong. Are we always better when we feel better? Perhaps my satisfaction in a cheap white curtain is the same thing a woman feels when she buys a drapery or a bit of bric-a-brac which costs many hundreds — maybe after all it is only vanity! There is a great question as to just how far a woman should follow her sense of beauty. My theory on the subject is that she should stop at a general harmony of colouring.

I heard a woman say that she lived on fried potatoes in order to purchase a set of Dresden cups and saucers, and made all sorts of sacrifices — resorted to actual juggling with her allowance and spent days and nights of harassing calculation, which finally ended in the possession of several fine Oriental rugs. I knew a woman who fairly ran her family distracted in her craze

for antique furniture. If she saw a chance to get an old mahogany bedstead or a cherry wood bureau she would fret and mope until her husband, in desperation, would buy it for her and pay the exorbitant price of having it rehabilitated. But no sooner would this be accomplished than a sale of rugs would come on and she would find one particularly ragged, particularly faded, especially dilapidated and redolent of camel's dung and spices and then all former achievements in the line of "beds, tables, and candlesticks" would seem as nothing compared with this treasure of the Orient.

I am doubtful that these rugs are worth the money we put in them, but admit there is a fascination about them as they lie askew and tattered upon the hardwood floor — they are narcotic, hypnotic, despotic and what not, and so when women get educated up to them and feel this subtle charm they become a need, an absolute need, of a woman's life. We can all order our lives to avoid these needs, however, and it is our duty to do so. We can take a lesson from the Oriental rug and follow it out in the simple and

unpretentious arrangement of our rooms, we can avoid pronounced colours, avoid glaring newness and keep to a gentle harmony — a quiet effect which is the great charm of the Oriental rug. Our grandmothers used to achieve this in the hit and miss rag carpet, the dull blue china, and the “mulberry” ware once so popular. I remember a set of mulberry plates I used to see in an old dining-room long ago. This room was low ceiled and wide, with a shiny, bare floor, a gaunt old sideboard with pewter vessels upon it, a tall clock with a quiet habit of letting time get away unnoticed, a huge fireplace with a crane in it, an old armchair with the splints in the seat worn to glistening slickness, and a drop leaf table against the wall. If there was anything in the way of floor covering it was a strip of faded “hit and miss” in front of the fireplace. The mulberry plates we ate our meals from — or our dinners at any rate — had the Lord’s prayer inscribed upon them. There was a general monotone of colouring in this room. Uncle David sometimes wore a nankeen waistcoat and Aunt Ann’s best gown was a

magenta delaine, but the tones were soft—and they soothe my memory like those “dim rooms wherein the sunshine is made mild” that Riley tells us about.

I think there is another way around to the Oriental rug effect that does not require so much worry and striving. It consists merely in not wishing for things. I heard a woman in a talk upon art say that if a woman had her choice between three beautiful hand-made chairs and six common ones she must always choose the three beautiful ones. I think this was false doctrine. It seems to me that it would depend entirely upon the number of persons to be seated. Chairs are made to sit upon, and utility comes first. I should hate to be obliged, when I was very tired, to stand up or sit on the floor for art's sake, but this is a mistake women frequently make—they live in discomfort for the sake of things that count with other people. I love beautiful and artistic things, but they are not an absolute need of my life, like three respectable meals a day and plenty of bed covering and a good warm fire. Some people have a talent for comfort, others a mania for discomfort.

I suppose that the needs of a woman's heart and life are as various as the kinds of people it takes to make a world. There are, however, some generalities that include all manners and conditions of women. I should say, taking all things into consideration, that the greatest need of a woman's life is a big good-hearted boss, a man who knows enough to let her have her own way until she undertakes to make a fool of herself and then stops her. Next, her greatest need is a home, no matter whether she thinks so or not, a home with plenty of work, plenty of care, plenty of responsibility. The irresponsible lives that women are leading day by day — the freedom they are seeking from real work of any kind is a menace to the future of our race. The tendency to purchase ready-cooked food, to eat at clubs and restaurants — in short, to "browse" — is making us a race of nomads, pitifully lacking in permanent abiding places. The tendency of modern business fosters this unfortunate state of affairs. So many men are "on the road" so many wives must live through a great part of the time as best they may, and

women are apt to form the browsing habit when they have n't a lot of people to do for — to cook for and plan for every single day.

Women need beauty in their lives as flowers need water and sunshine, but many women do not know where the real fountain of beauty springs up, clear and limpid as the fount of Bandusia, in the rock-guarded hollow apostrophised by Horace. Appreciation does not demand possession. I love Corot above all other artists, yet I never fret because I do not own one of his canvases. I admire Oriental rugs and hand-wrought furniture, but I never spend a moment in scheming how I might get them. The possession of beautiful things is not half so good as a real appreciation of beauty in the abstract, for this is a treasure that neither moth nor rust can corrupt. And this is true of other things less tangible than floor coverings and house furnishings.

It is true of love. It is not nearly so important to have love as to cherish love's perfect ideal and never depart from it, no matter how, in life, you may seem to have missed it. It is true of religion. Belief,

demonstration, experience, none of these is worth half so much as a clear conception of what religion really is. A woman said to me not long ago: "If you had religion you would be a saint." I felt a powerful gladness in the lack she seemed to notice, for if there is anything I don't want to be it is a saint. But my friend misunderstood me. I have religion in the broadest sense, because I appreciate religion. I wish women had less of it and men more — we should then have a better world.

The great need of women's lives just at the present time is that they lay aside ambitions for the sake of real appreciations. That they stop doing things for the name of the thing. Women need to stop dreading being behind the procession. If you get far enough behind so as not to have to take its dust you will feel as if you had been born again into a new heaven and a new earth. The wonders of the world will be new to you — you will be a child, walking once more amid the miracles of living. If you can get out of the smug atmosphere of up-to-date smartness, the chit-chat

effect of familiarity with "what the world is doing" and feel life to be a thing apart from movements and organizations and society, an individual thing, all your own, you may know that you are beginning to come to life.

Keep a place on the floor sacred to the Oriental rug — but never get the rug, for then you would see how little it is worth. Acquiring expensive possessions is like seeing a fairy. The charm of the little wild-wood place, where the ferns are growing, is in the fact that just as you got there the fairies scampered away. Be poor and quarrel about it, and make up and be happy over it, and set the dreams going again. Do not fret if your neighbour does not have to work. The road to great-heartedness is not an easy one, and women particularly need to find it.

## X

### THE TRUTH ABOUT LOVE

A LITERARY man said to me not long ago: "Why is it that you tell the truth about everything but love?" I hate to be snipped up this way by a pointed question, and I felt exactly as I should if he had asked me what is the capital of Abyssinia, or who was the author of some quotation, maddeningly familiar, yet, for the time at least, escaped from my memory. I gasped a little and then felt a sudden sinking of the heart, because if I have n't told the truth it is because I do not know it. I am a most consistent truthful James, having taken my cue in early life from a note a man wrote to me one September day — say thirty years ago. A day with a quality of tangible gold in the sunshine, a divine mist out on the hills, where it seemed such a pity one could n't be walking with her beloved instead of going to

high school. However, the note was something. In regard to some mild fibbing I had done for his sake, he reprimanded me. "Let me say to you," he wrote, "in the words of Daddy Sherman to his troops. 'Don't tell any more lies than are strictly necessary.'" I took the lesson to heart and have made truth more or less a study ever since.

To be hauled up and requested to tell the truth about love partakes distinctly of the day of judgment. There is a dreadful silence, which the prisoner at the bar is expected to break by some statement creditable to himself, and the poor fellow standing with drooping head and downcast eyes, cannot think of a word to say, and finally, in desperation, stammers out "guilty," though perhaps in reality he is n't a bad fellow at all. Fortunately, the Great Judge knows better than we do what constitutes guilt. My position in regard to love is like that of many people regarding ghosts — they believe in them, and have seen several things which they can't quite explain, but if you pin them down closely and ask them

if they have actually seen a ghost they will hem and haw, and look mysterious, but they will not make any sworn statements.

The sex attraction is happily in a measure governed by laws both on the statute and unwritten, and the only pity is that it cannot be still more subject to legal intervention. The family usually has its origin in the union of a young couple irresistibly drawn together by the sex attraction. Fortunately, very often there is also a real affection between the two which grows stronger with the years, a deathless love, bound by a thousand nameless little ties, besides the great bonds of mutual passion and the holy union of parentage. I fully believe that the vast majority of couples marry with very little correct idea of love, and it is just as well that they should, for many whom I have known who have sat in the sunshine of youth waiting patiently for great love to come riding by have seen the sunshine fade and the weather of life grow gray and windbeaten, and have finally at the end picked up some poor straggler from Love's retinue and sought desperately to make a prince of him.

We are all of us a little weak, a little silly on the subject of love, or if we are not we ought to be — heaven deliver us from the cynic who sneers at love — let all men despise him, all women flee from him. Now, if it is the truth I must tell, I believe that most men love their wives, but have a poor way of showing it, and that most women love their husbands and have demonstrated the fact until the man would rather read the paper or talk about something else. He ought n't to do this, because there is sure to come a time when he will regret it — but love is long, and time is fleeting, and we are all of us such ingrates that we will in course of time become matter of fact over any commodity, however important, when there is such a lot of it. A man likes to seek for something that involves competition, and here is this woman pouring out treasures of love at his feet — this woman who would n't for all the world look at another man, who has n't a single interest that does n't involve him, who weeps if he does n't kiss her and who loves him — loves him — loves him!

The first thing a woman should do when she loves a man like that, all things being propitious, or not being either, for the matter of that, is to bear a child of his. This is another subject upon which no woman has ever told the truth, or ever intends to, perhaps, but that is another story. Having borne this child, the woman has welded the lifelong bond — there is no time after that to speculate about love, and no need of such speculation, thank God, in a good woman's life. Of all the phrases that flash like torches in the pages of that wise Bible none is more illuminating than the expression: "A little child shall lead them." And no legend of all our lore is more deeply suggestive than that the wise men brought their best homage to a little child. How many children have saved their father's and mother's souls, who can imagine?

The child that is born of love will be beautiful, happy, and good. There will be a noble serenity in its nature and on its face, and if the mother loved the father as good women love she will love the child as good mothers love, and there will never be

any question of disruption in that family, especially if in due season more children are born into the home. It is true that men and women with families sometimes forget, and depart from the duties of people who have taken upon themselves such holy obligations, but heaven is kind, and it is not often that such things occur, and we have only to look at the miseries that follow upon a transgression of the social law to see how immeasurably it pays to follow the long, straight road. A woman who has children has a life work, and whoever has a life work has happiness, the harder the work the better.

I am not a believer in woman's rights in the common acceptance of the term, but I do believe in marriage as a partnership in which the woman must bear her share of the load. Man's natural comrade in the battle of life is a woman, and she should be a healthy, normal woman with strong legs and useful hands and big brains and a heart for any fate. He should place her behind him in the fight, but she must know how to load the guns and have them ready to his hand, and she must know how to die when the

time comes and to help him die if she must.

This reminds me of a little story of married life. A couple were married and lived on a little farm. Two children were born, and when they were half-grown the man was stricken with consumption. For a time they tried to ignore it. But as time went on glances would pass between them, in which the dreadful thought was inarticulately spoken. Finally, they came to talking of it, and to planning how she would manage with the farm and the boys when he was gone. The woman decided to be brave, and this helped the man, though he was young and did not wish to die. One day he was better than he had been for months, and a little ray of sunshine fell into their gloomy cavern of despair. They decided that he was going to get well, and in celebration of the new hope, they hitched up and drove to visit some relatives several miles away, for it was a Sunday, and there was a little leisure. They had a joyful visit, but on their return, while unhitching the horses, the man was seized with a hemorrhage. The end came

so swiftly that there was no time to summon aid. She was alone on that remote little farm, with the two little boys and her dying husband. She just had courage to place the oldest boy on one of the horses and send him for help before she broke down — it had caught her with her defences down; the little ray of hope had unnerved her. But the dying man had still the power to speak to her, and he said: "Wife, you must not desert me like that — you must come and help me die." In a moment she was calm. The old, familiar call of love had steadied her. When the neighbours arrived he was gone, and the woman who had helped him die was ready for whatever else life had for her to do. This is a phase of love and its possibilities, and there are other phases requiring almost, but not quite, so much courage. Death is the final trial. We think that there are worse things — we fancy it would be easier to bury our beloved than to find him unfaithful to us, but it is not so. So strong is the tie of the mortal body that anything is better than death.

In speaking of love, I am, naturally,

speaking of woman's love. In all matters pertaining to sex, women are stronger than men. If the moral sense of women were not infinitely stronger than that of men, society would soon become chaotic. If women were not truer than men, stronger to resist temptation, more loyal to their homes and more devoted to their children, morality would languish and free love would flourish like the green bay tree.

As we grow older we are more and more sensible of the wise provision of Nature in many things. Most women, after marriage, lose their youthful charm. They look married. They lose interest in preening their feathers, and the cares of a family soon rub off the downy, elusive, seductive charm of the young girl. Sometimes this seems a pity, but we who know life as it is, know that it is well. The little mother must go in sober guise. She must walk softly and gravely along, and she must be shielded and guarded — there must be dozens of reasons why the door of youth, once closed upon her shall not reopen. A thousand little tendernesses and loyalties bind her husband to her. If her

cheeks are a little wan and the curl falls out of her pretty hair, it is for his sake, and if I were a man, the last thing I should deliberately choose would be a very handsome and attractive wife. Like an expensive jewel, it would be a risky possession. Many beautiful women are reasonably free from vanity and strongly fortified with moral sense; many more are not. A pretty woman is more likely to come to grief than any other creature saving a very bright and talented man, so it is well for us, if our wives are just dear girls, healthy and happy and making a fair show among the other women of the club or the Ladies' Aid Society.

The real test of love comes at middle age. I have long ago ceased to question divine intelligence, but I do wonder why the most crucial cares of a woman's life come to her at a time when she is least able to bear them. Just as the wheels of youth begin to run down and the cruel realisation of hardening features, whitening hair, lagging step and stoutening form begins to fill the mother's mind with apprehension and affect her body with nervous depression, some daughter is

marrying, some boy cutting capers at college, some child graduating, or, worse still, some dismaying grandchild inconsiderately being born. I have noticed in my brief span of years — for I have been a noticing child, and that is something creditable — remember, recording angel, to put it down — that if a man is going to make a fool of himself at all, he generally does it at middle age. He is seized with a sudden terror lest life should get away without his having made the most of it. When I see a man taking this kind of a turn at a time when nothing on earth but sobriety, devotion to his family and to the ties of domestic life can preserve his dignity and tide him safely over into venerable, grand old age, I almost believe in a personal devil. It is such a clever move for the tempter to whisper in his ear:

The bird of life is singing in the sun,  
Short is his song — nor only just begun.  
A call, a trill, a rapture, then so soon  
A silence, and the song is done, is done.

This strikes upon the ear of middle age with poignant meaning. Perhaps we have not heard the sweetest notes of that song —

perhaps, oh maddening thought — life has not unfolded to us the dearest page — we feel a sense of nonfulfilment and the shuddering thought that one is so long dead! At such a time common sense is a jewel beyond price, and if there is n't a large lump of it around in the family there is likely to be a muss. Men and women should know that love, more than any other thing, is a duty. It is a thing to be cultivated and guarded, and the man who by slow neglect and indifference allows the impassable wall of a woman's pride to grow between him and her is the greatest fool on earth. He should, for selfish motives if no higher ones, have kept her love so well that when the temptations — the weaknesses that are so purely masculine, and which men so fatally mistake for strength — assail him, he can fly to her as the Hebrews of old ran to their cities of refuge, and she is but a poor wife if there is not enough of the maternal in her love to receive him with forbearance, patience, and pardon rather than with the pride and bitterness of a slighted love. Life would be a beautiful thing if we all preserved our

fealties inviolate to the end. But we do fairly well, considering our environment and our purblind state into which the light of truth glimmers as through a glass darkly.

At middle age a woman is likely to assume a slighted and down-trodden air because she feels so strongly the change in her own appearance. She is on the lookout for neglect, she feels a horrid jealousy of younger, prettier women. Frequently she puts treasonable ideas into her husband's head by reiterating the question if he loves her as he used to do. The truth is, women change but little in their husband's eyes. Think of your mother's face and say whether you noticed when it changed from youth to age — was it not mother's face all through the years, and when you saw it for the last time in her coffin was it not as beautiful as when your baby eyes first beheld it, long and long ago? So most men feel toward their wives; it is the real women that they love, the gracious and comforting presence, the confidence, the nearness that means home and rest and peace.

By the time a woman reaches middle age she should have provided herself with a

thousand resources of purely personal interest. She should be a woman of affairs, an independent citizen of the commonwealth, an intelligent denizen of the world. She should have cultivated individuality with success. She is but a dull pupil in the school of life if she has not learned that in our discipline we may at any moment be called upon to give up the very nearest and dearest thing in our lives. For this reason we should have many near and dear things, that we may not be totally bereft.

I think a little spice of the "Old Nick" is as good a thing as a woman can keep about her. It is well enough for husband and children to have to hunt their holes sometimes and to know that this gracious person who can make such excellent coffee, such incomparable biscuits, such strawberry jam, and can so deliciously bathe one's feet and soothe an aching head, can on occasion go on a rampage calculated to make the devils believe and tremble. A sense of humour should be cherished as a means of grace. A man hates ridicule and he dreads the keen steel of his wife's pene-

trating glance when she sees straight through him, and he knows it. The rear view of a man as he slinks away, knowing that his wife is laughing at him is a sight of mingled humour and pathos, there is such a suggestion of caudal appendage, meekly disposed in canine fashion, that the laugh melts to tenderness — maternal tenderness for eternal boyhood, and she will cook something good for his supper as sure as the world.

There are many chapters in the book of love; much contention as to what love is; many heresies are promulgated by the mentally unsound and the physically morbid and those who have been unfortunately mated for life. But we cannot accept these as typical. We must believe that love flourishes at its best in the married state, that love means father, mother, children and home. The best thing that can happen to any woman is that the one man of her life come into it early and remain late. It is a bad thing for a girl to have many lovers, and I know of nothing more disturbing or dangerous in a woman's life than a broken love affair. Occasionally a young couple

who, by every law of great nature and the social welfare, should have been married, are separated. Each marries another and, because they are good people they live in comparative happiness, but they never forget. Nightfall seldom comes but she whispers half unconsciously: "God bless him, wherever he is," and the firelight scarcely flickers upon his hearth without bringing him a fancy of her face in the gathering shadows. This situation is one among the unwritten tragedies and takes rank with splendid sorrows that are dearer than joys. A generous proportion of absence, a large separation by land and sea, is the proper treatment for such a malady. In such a case with seeming impiety we must revise the law and say: "What man has joined together let not God put asunder." Though God who created us male and female and gave to us the instinct — nay the command — for union seems to be the dumb thing we are smothering in our hearts, for the sake of human reason and law.

There are instances of the *grande* passion; of love that transcends the understanding

of average mortals. Occasionally it comes to great people who are strong enough to break over what they deem the puny social law with seeming impunity. They have the personal courage to meet the sure disillusion that follows after union, and they are usually people who are masters of some divine art which can console them and keep them great and calm and courageous to the end. Personally, between them this high-handed disregard of laws that they argue were made for little people seems all right. But their influence and example to little people is hugely wrong. We have a duty toward the little people, and must temper our teachings to their understandings. In every phase of life the great must be sacrificed to the small. The good, the patient, the true must serve the petty, the narrow, and selfish. The salvation of the poor comes through the destruction of the rich, and princes must fall that peasants may rise. Thus we must sacrifice sometimes what seems ours by almost supernal right, for the sake of duller souls, that their illumination may come the sooner.

It is the business, then, of all good men and women that love should pertain to the married state, that it be held above intrigue and that divorce for any but the gravest causes be held a crime unpardonable. If, in our personal experience there is longing and renunciation, some shadow of regret, we must not take our case as typical. Love, like religion, must have a high ideal, far beyond our human grasp, but ever before us, drawing us to some sense of nearness to it. "We are our longing" and perhaps some day, broken with the cares of life and crushed by a sense of defeat, we may wake to find our longing verified and ourself the creature we wished to be.

## XI

### OLD MAIDS AND SINGLE WOMEN

ALL old maids do not remain single. Mylo Jones's wife was one, and I have known others who accidentally got into the married state and even gave perfunctory nourishment to families of precocious, unchildlike offspring.

Likewise I have known splendid matronly women who have lived single when they should by all indications of nature have been:

Woored and married and a  
Kissed and carried awa'.

Perhaps this was what they were waiting for. But they should not have waited too long. Some girls are wedded by tumultuous wooing, but after waiting a reasonable length of time a woman ought to take her destiny into her own hands and pick up some good fellow who would hardly have

the courage to ask her if she had n't let him know it would be agreeable.

Many single women remain so because they do not see an opportunity to make what their friends would consider a suitable marriage. There are comparatively few suitable marriages, and yet the vast majority of them do well enough. We can't have things too suitable in this world. Harmony is a fine thing, but it can grow monotonous. Some people who are imminently well suited in temperament, religion, and social standing are dull and have children of distressing mediocrity. When a woman has made an unsuitable marriage she has provided herself with a life work, and that is more than most old maids have. I was never cut out for an old maid. I could n't be one. The avocations to which they lend their energies are all out of my line. I never could bear to go to temperance meeting or teach a Sunday-school class or sit up with the sick or teach school or do hand sewing or read an improving book. There must be something doing or I fall into a green and yellow melancholy. Fortunately, I have never

had much time for melancholy. The affairs of life have been so urgent that there was no chance for repining.

On one side of the house I come of a family somewhat noted for single women. For generations back there have been old maids in the family, and some of them in a rather virulent form. I remember Cousin Peggy, who was a terror. She had a red head and a sharp tongue, and when we saw her coming, riding at a gallop on her old sorrel mare and looking for all the world like a witch on a broomstick, a change came over the spirit of our dreams and life seemed suddenly not so tenderly radiant as it had before. How she peppered us with sarcasms and humiliated us with shrewd questionings about the Scriptures. How she loved to let our beaux know that we powdered our faces and were slow about darning our stockings! How she did enjoy telling what she would do if she had a family, and how young people used to conduct themselves when she was a girl!

Cousin Peggy lived in one of the most romantic places I have ever seen. First you

came to a mill with pollard willows along the race, then you came to Cousin Peggy's house, which was a log one, with queer little upstairs windows and a latticed veranda. A little brook ran through the yard and there was a rustic bridge across it. Then you came to the old, old brick church of Shemeriah, with its big grove of trees and its quaint little "session house" in the yard, its graveyard where "the mossy marbles rest," and its week-day air of mystery. There was a long stretch of green between the church and Cousin Peggy's house and the sunshine had a way of dreaming there on a summer afternoon that nearly made you homesick when you were a little girl and hundreds of miles away from mother. Sunshine has a way of emphasising distances with its reminiscent afternoon quality. Cousin Peggy had a sister who made an unsuitable marriage, died of it, and left three little girls for her to rear. They were shy little creatures, as quiet as mice, but despite Cousin Peggy's vigorous chaperonage they all married. I remember thinking they would as I saw them walk meekly across the

green to church, they were slender little things with white hands and big, dark eyes — some way no spot is so secluded as to hide from masculine eyes a charming young maid with a delicate air. I never saw their mother, but used to marvel that she could have been a sister to angular orthodox, disagreeable Presbyterian Peggy.

As for Cousin Eliza, she was different. She was unmarried and lived to be past eighty, as Cousin Peggy did, but though she had no abiding place and “lived around” among the relationship, people were always glad to see her. She owned her own saddle horse and carried her wardrobe in a carpet sack, riding about wherever she choose and staying three months at a time. She was a homey sort of person, cheerful and clever — a person who seemed to fit in in almost any household, and to be an ornament to any dinner table in times of presbytery or wedding festivities. She lived a luxurious life, for though she always took a hand at sewing or other ladylike work, and was great at managing the servants tactfully and looking after company and assisting in many ways,

she lived in the old times when actual labour was unknown to the white women of her state, for she was a typical "maiden lady" of old Virginia. I used to wonder if she ever felt any sense of disappointment in life, but never heard her express any, never saw her in a dejected mood, or noticed upon her strong-featured, handsome face a shade of disappointment or yearning after the fulfilment of woman's destiny.

In thinking of her, however, it is with an involuntary sigh of pity for her that she missed being mated, missed the sense of home-coming loved ones at twilight, the passion of the warm little child's body close to her breast, the groping of moist little hands reading lines of love on her face, the little voice stumbling toward language and telling so much more than it will ever be able to express after it has mastered it!

Life does not bring destiny to all of us, just as the tree does not bring fruit to every blossom, and I suppose that there are compensations for the maiden state, or we would not see so many placid faces among them.

In recent years there has been much said

in praise of the bachelor maid, much prating about women's disinclination to give up their "freedom" and marry. It is true that the opprobrium of old maid is now removed from them. It is no longer taken for granted that a woman remains single for lack of opportunity to marry, though this is just about as true as it ever was. All women will marry if the right man comes along, but some of them do not know that any man who will do at all is the right one. A husband is what you believe him to be. We all know men whom their wives call James and William and Samuel, who are Jim and Bill and Sam to their fellow-men. When a good woman marries a man she dignifies him, and it rests with her whether he keeps this endowment of idealisation.

Men take very irrational attitudes on the marriage question. They invariably feel that it is a reproach to a woman if she desires to marry. Doubtless they are in a position to wonder what she wants with a man. Men nearly always rage at the thought of their daughters marrying, and a man generally goes to the marriage of his eldest

daughter in an anguished frame of mind, evinced by his pale and miserable countenance. This can only be because he knows how unworthy almost any man is of a sweet, pure, well-brought-up girl.

It is also because of man's persistent misunderstanding of the dignity and holiness of the functions of life. Men persist in being jocose over matters of sex, in making the most mysterious and Godlike things of life the subject of ribald jest, coarse allusion, innuendo, and satirical remark. But as he takes the woman to protect her from the hardships of life, so she takes him to save his soul, to hold him to some sense of the holy purposes of our being, to forgive his defective insight into things as they are and place her love as a shield between him and that element of mankind to whom little is sacred — men who have forgotten, if they ever learned them, the lines they groped after on their mother's faces.

I was brought up in an atmosphere of femininity. Hoopskirts and Balmoral petticoats were encamped around me. At my grandmother's home there were only herself

and three maiden daughters. My uncle, who lived just above the orchard, was a "man body," it is true, but though he was huge in stature and had big red whiskers, he somehow seemed one of the girls when we all sat around the old dining-table after dinner and discussed foreordination, election, and free agency. I received much goodly council from all of the dear women who had a hand in my bringing up, and hope I profited by it — but I have learned nearly all I know by doing what they told me not to. I never had a beau at my grandmother's but once, and he was from Virginia, where old maids were taken as a matter of course. In those days Indiana was the "West"—and in the West old maids were so rare as to be regarded with a sort of awe, and no young man of my acquaintance would have dared to visit me and brave the array of maiden propriety that surrounded me.

One summer evening I started to walk from my home in the village to my grandmother's, a mile out in the country, to stay all night. One often hears of the lax dis-

cipline of to-day, compared with that of the days our of youth, but in recalling this little episode, it seems a wonder that my mother would allow me to do this. It was a lonely road with woods on either side, and to-day I would not allow my daughter to take the same walk alone at twilight. But in those days we had never heard of a tramp and the Negro terror was unknown. I did not take the walk alone, however, because as I passed a certain house (oh, it was too good to be true!) a young man snatched up his cap from the edge of the porch where he was sitting and came flying after me. When I told him where I was going he proposed to accompany me and spend the evening with me at grandmother's.

I do not know why a woman cannot forget the future and enjoy the passing hour as a man does, or rather I do know why, and it is a blessed thing for her that she is so constituted, but I could scarcely enjoy that lovely walk through the long summer twilight for thinking how it would be when we got there. I had some faint hope that grandmother would be in bed, but I knew

that they would never allow me to sit out in the barrel-stave hammock by the cedar-trees. At best we could only hope for the parlour with the best lamp lighted and smelling of kerosene and the unfriendly Windsor chairs.

They were very hospitable at grandmother's. The house sits far back from the road, and a little path runs from the gate downhill and up again between a double row of ragged, storm-beaten old cedar-trees. This long distance to the gate had its disadvantages on dewy summer mornings, when the ladies filed out to start for church and must hold up their voluminous petticoats quite beyond the line of propriety, disclosing cloth gaiters and white "clocked" stockings. Fortunately there was no masculine eye to see save that of my uncle, who looked the other way. There was an immense advantage, however, in noting the approach of company and being able to brush one's hair and put on a clean white apron and assume a look of composure by the time they reached the front door. My friend and I were so loth to come to the end of our walk that there

was ample time for each member of the family to assume a holiday air in time to greet us with great placidity. Grandmother had not thought of going to bed, and had got on her best cap and cape. Even my three little cousins, who had scampered down from their house on seeing our approach, had been hastily mopped with shiny soap and had their hair slicked back conspicuously. They all met us at the door and escorted us into the parlour, where the lamp had already been lit. We used a candle on summer evenings to read the chapter and go to bed by.

They were all very glad to see my friend — it seemed to me their welcome was almost oppressive. There were just six of the Windsor chairs, and we each had one. There seemed to be a great many of my aunts; their dresses, held out by their hoops, made a festoon almost around the room. My oldest cousin sat on a three-legged stool and stared solemnly at the young man, while the two smaller ones took turns backing up against the aunts and making their hoops tilt precariously. My young friend was a

very affable fellow, and talked Virginia with my elders while I sat and looked absently at the daguerreotypes on the table.

Finally, at nine o'clock he said he must be going. The family went once more in a body to the door to speed the parting guest. There was a moon by this time seeking through the cedar walk for something, like Omar's moon in the garden on a summer night. My friend was going away to college the next morning. My heart sank as he shook hands with the fine ladies and even the three shy children. Then he turned to me and very blandly requested me to walk out to the gate with him. My eldest aunt indulgently said I might, and added that the children might go along to come back with me. But my youngest aunt, she of the soft blue eyes and pretty brown hair, gently put her arms around the children and drew them back, saying it was time they were in bed.

She died, unmarried, at the age of thirty-seven, but she was not an old maid, and I know she has gone to heaven, where "the solitary are set in families."

## XII

### A CHAPTER FOR MEN TO READ

WHEN a woman starts out to live her own life she is contemplating a long, rough journey. There will be many beauties along the way, many pitfalls, many dangers, and, worse than all, many beautiful mirages that will lure her over dead wastes of desert sands on fruitless quests and leave her alone under the wide canopy of heaven, that comes down so close on the desert — alone and ready to die. No man liveth unto himself. We are constituted a gregarious race. We must have friends, companions, people to love. Women naturally want people to work for, to sacrifice themselves for, to enfold in their voluminous mantle of love, to shelter and protect with the maternal heart that has always room for one more, always patience with the erring, always forgiveness for the wicked.

But more needful than sacrifice to a woman's nature, is the steadfast love of a strong man. The feeling of being taken care of — the safety of the "house-band," the natural protector, the provider — the man. Let no woman's rights woman dare to ridicule this feminine instinct, or affirm that in her career of speech-making and meeting men on terms of "equality" she has found anything better than a good man's love, or that there is any state of affairs, or domestic arrangement that exceeds the happiness of a comfortable home with father, mother, and children. I would write a book on the duties of fatherhood if I thought the men would read it, but they would n't. Good fathers would n't need it and as for bad ones —

I have just lost a friend who was an ideal father. Of course, he was a gentleman. An ideal father could not be otherwise. Have you noticed how few heads of houses are really ornaments to their homes? How few men feel the responsibility regarding the atmosphere of home or realise that one of the most sacred duties in life is that of

looking after the way in which wife and daughters find their happiness? Men will tell you that it takes all their time to make a living, to foot the bills their families make, to furnish money for the insatiate demands of the women folk. Doubtless this arises from a mistake in the start — a lack of interest in little details of home. The want of loving consultation over necessities and possible luxuries may have brought about this unhappy state of affairs. Sullenness over bills, rather than gentle and kindly explanations, may make bigger bills next year. Make your women love you and you will learn how eager they are to help, how quick to make sacrifices.

A wise mother is a wonderful thing, but a wise and kind father is fairly too good to be true. Most men turn the responsibility of bringing up the children over to the mother. They stand ready to punish them if they do wrong or to lecture them for faults which, in all probability, the children inherit from them, but they do not take a hand in the earliest training of the babies' minds. They think it too trivial. They

are willing to let the child's first impressions of father be of a gloomy presence, enveloped in the evening paper — a presence which demanded tiptoe and sign language and a little shadow on mother's face. How different is the father who realises his great responsibility, and at the same time allows the blessings which God has given him to be dear to him!

The friend of whom I just now spoke had a proper sense of the true sphere of manhood. He knew that paternity was a great privilege, a holy thing never to be spoken of in a ribald jest, or treated as a mere incident in the life of a man. Having given life to his children he knew it to be his duty to live with them and for them and to impart to them all that life meant to him. He knew better than to read selfishly, learn selfishly, develop selfishly. He knew how to become as a little child, to join in his children's plays, to read to them, talk to them, and his favourite song when he rocked them to sleep was, "I Hear Thee Speak of a Better Land." I heard his daughter after she had grown children of her own say that when

she was ill the first thing she wanted was to hear her father sing that sweet, illogical, old-fashioned song. Have you ever, when you were very ill, had a big man with rough, strong, gentle hands lift you about in the bed? If that man were father, brother, husband, there was only one thing more comforting and that was the thought of God's everlasting arms. Men have the opportunity to be this infinite, inexpressibly dear thing to the women of their families. How many of them miss the opportunity—who is going to tell? Not the wives, mothers, sisters who miss this beauty out of their lives. No! They will keep the secret, and hold to the ideal, for without the ideal we cannot live. I know no deeper bitterness than the lack of the manly presence in a woman's life, no more crucial disillusion than the discovery that the man with whom she has formed a life partnership neither knows nor cares about the holiness and beauty of a home and love and domestic life. He may have a sort of off-hand feeling of responsibility for "my wife and the kids," and it may mean more to him than

his behaviour indicates — indeed it does mean more. There is something in the training and associations of men that leads them to take this light attitude toward holy things — God knows what it is — the same thing that leads them to think it smart to smoke and chew tobacco and play poker and have liaisons with servant girls and do all sorts of weak, unworthy, unmanly things. Maybe it is the devil, but one dare not believe in the devil if he is going to believe in God.

At any rate, it is a fact that love of home and family lies closer to the heart of the average man than appears from his actions, and as women, with two-thirds of life's patience and faith and strength of character in our make-up, we must always take this to be a fact, even when man's carelessness, his coldness, his negligence of duty is at its worst. Even when we are famishing for the word of love he will not give us, we must try to remember what a spendthrift man is, persistently flinging his birthright to the winds, fatuously waiting till it is gone to weep for his loss in sackcloth and ashes. In our daily bitterness over what we have missed

in life we say to ourselves that such love is not worth having. We quote from George Eliot: "I have long since lost faith in the love that has ceased to express itself." We arm ourselves in reserve and pride and go ahead fiercely beating a path for ourselves along the wilderness of life's injustices. But this love is worth something. We find that out, sometimes, after we have lost it. This love that has ceased to express itself springs to life in an emergency — and in any case it is better than anything a woman can substitute for it. Let women remember this. The position of a true, self-respecting, quiet wife is an unassailable one, and from any point of view far exceeds that of the *divorcée*, no matter with how "strong" a hand she may have taken hold of life. I have heard women say: "I would not allow any man to spoil my life." It is a praiseworthy sentiment, but is better in the living than in the expression. Remember, you are living your life for yourself, not for the grandstand.

Most women live along happily, day by day, without pausing to take an inventory

of the stock on hand. They quarrel with their husbands, have little reconciliations, and, in a general way, live, breathe, and have their being in the light of their eyes. They make no plans without them. But occasionally a woman is brought up short to take a look around and see what she can do to make life worth living. She considers her assets. The first may be a husband who never in any of his plans considers her wishes or her happiness. He hates to stay at home, he loathes society, if she wants to go somewhere he at once vetoes the idea. He does not like to read with her or drive with her, or sit beside the fire and talk with her. If she slips her hand into his he refuses to hold it; he lets it slip idly down, out of his clasp, and pretends not to notice her pitiful little advances toward friendliness. He never notices her looks. If she wears a pretty gown he does not see it; if she scores a little social triumph he does not congratulate her. Perhaps he has not in ten years taken her into his arms and told her that he loves her. He scolds her unmercifully if there is a bill to pay, and

never in all their married life has he asked her what are her plans for the evening or invited her to go with him to a friend's or relative's house.

I hope I am not describing many instances of married life in this particular one, but this situation has existed in reasonably good society. If the woman has a thinking mind she sometimes, sooner or later, asks herself if she is called on to make this do for her share of conjugal happiness. Generally she has to make it do.

Women, taken on an average, are not brilliant and attractive enough to command a hazard of new fortunes in the matrimonial market. Very rarely, indeed, does a woman who has been unhappily married ten or fifteen years have enough attraction left to arrest the attention of a marrying man. But this is beside the point; we are talking of good women, not of cold-blooded creatures who regard divorce as a possibility of life.

Yes, she has to make it do, but she must look out for compensations. If she has been an obedient child of God He has already sent her the greatest compensation in the shape

of children to love and work for, and a home — a home with a piteous lack of completeness to be sure, but still a home to feed and fill part of her yearning woman's heart. It is so good that we like to cook and clean and keep the linen neat and perk up the window curtains and polish the floor and "hang loved pictures on the wall" and see the faces of our friends around the table and in the comforting glow of the firelight.

If the wife of a careless, undutiful husband be a woman of beauty and charm, may the Lord have mercy upon her soul! May her friends rally around her and her relations appoint themselves her bodyguard. Nobody knows in what hour of unspeakable weakness and longing the coveted tender word or glance of approval may come, from some dangerous, insidious source. Nature made us strong only for the natural shocks that flesh is heir to; she forgot to arm us with a special coat of mail for unseen emergencies. I am sure she neglected to arrange for pretty women whose husbands live to slight them. Now I think I hear some ill-favoured and, consequently, unduly vir-

tuous sister exclaim: "Did n't she give them common sense?" Maybe so, but she should have given them uncommon sense, insight, inspiration, heavenly purity, divine steadfastness of purpose — and these good lady, you who have never been in the way of temptation, are qualities we do not inherit unalloyed from generations of a sin-cursed race. Very happily, however, common sense is a shining quality of the female sex. If it were not, our society would be in a chaotic state. My experience of life has shown me that women have more strength of character than men, much more moral sense, much greater power to resist temptation. It is true society fairly forces women to be good, but aside from this there is in women a genuine liking for personal cleanliness and purity, both of body and soul, that lifts them to a clearer atmosphere than the smoke-polluted haze of man's environment, and shows them the end from the beginning as man seldom sees it.

It is a fact, praise be to the Creator, that few women are qualified for immorality — the vast majority of female persons are

plain, steadfast individuals with domestic and social affairs on their hands, families to rear and male companions to live with whom they think the world and all of. Do not disparage this state of affairs, you advanced thinkers who are tainted with decadent philosophy. Genius consists in half unconsciously doing some admirable thing. Wherever you find the spiritual structure of a real home you find a work that so far exceeds the writing of a book or the carving of a statue as to make the latter seem totally insignificant.

When lovely woman stoops to folly it is seldom brought about by any coarse-grained fibre of her nature, but rather by those delicate flutings of the great god Pan that first arrested her maiden ear and brought to her heart the consciousness of sex. Her husband, grossly satisfied with what he regards as conjugal felicity, and hugely ignorant of the delicate confidence, the tender understanding, the nameless nearness of the spirit, which is the true intimacy of the married state, has left her to find compensations for these more than vital things. At first she is not con-

sciously in quest of them, she is only waiting for such a time as he shall return to the attitude in which he wooed and won her. The wistfulness of her waiting shines in her big, brooding eyes and adds a charm to the face where woman's beauty lingers like Indian summer in the fading of the year. The woman's personality is an appeal to every man she meets, and the "unprincipled" person who makes love to her is not so much to blame. I heard a man say to his wife in an argument on this subject that no man, however immoral, ever spoke a word of love or flattery to another man's wife unless she wished him to do so, and let him know it. I believe this. But why, when he was expounding, as husbands will, did he not tell her the whole truth, and say who is to blame in nine out of ten cases of this kind?

A blind horse can see that the blame lies with the pretty woman's husband. If he were what he should be, she would never be wishing for words of love and flattery from another man. Understand me. Other men do not make love to every pretty woman

who has a careless husband. But it is one of the dangers that may threaten the woman who is, with big-hearted courage of living, seeking to develop in herself a rounded character by fitting "other interests" into the niche in her heart where husband's affections ought to be. I use the word affection advisedly. We all know that youth's transcendental passion cannot last. Do we all know that affection is the only thing that will really take its place, and do we know, too, that affection can be cultivated and is more worth cultivating than any other thing in the world?

If I were a man and should discover that my wife was starting out to live her own life I should make it the business of my own to see that she did n't do it. I would be in it if I did n't lay up a cent. If you persistently place your affectionate devotion between your wife and the laudable purpose of living her own life, the probabilities are that she will not write a book or paint a great picture, or even cut a prominent figure in society, but she will be happy and your children will rise up and call you blessed.

## XIII

### THE HIGHER EDUCATION

ONE time a woman came to our little town to talk to us about the Higher Education. I was very much interested in the subject just at the time, for my daughter was being graduated from the High School, and I was actually suffering because we had n't money enough to send her to college.

I hoped that this great woman, who was dean of a college and who was to address our class of graduates, might help me. And still I was tortured by the fear that it might make me feel worse. I remembered a thousand and one nameless finenesses that the higher education brings to a naturally bright girl, and I felt it would fairly madden me to see and hear this woman, who was the typification of the new womanhood, the perfect product of modern civilisation, know-

ing, as I did, that I could never give my own child the opportunity of acquiring such an air.

The big class of graduates sat in a semi-circle on the stage, and I sat in the audience and worried because my daughter's dress "hiked" up a trifle in front and because she had only a dozen roses, while the girl who sat next to her and who was to go to a great Eastern college had three dozen, and by and by the great woman came out to the front of the stage and said: "Ladies and gentlemen." She did it all right, and smiled very sweetly, and I groaned in the spirit as I realised that if my daughter went out to teach a country school she would n't have an opportunity to learn to smile like that.

Before the speaker had talked very long I began to fear that there was that quality of sweetness in her voice that makes you wonder if the person does it all the time. You don't know whether you hope that she does or that she does n't.

But I was not going to be prejudiced against her because she was saying things so sweetly.

I don't like sweet things very well. I like coarse food plainly served and big thoughts ruggedly expressed — but I listened with all my ears, because everything has a message for you if you listen with all your ears.

I had gone to hear the speaker with a distinct longing for help. I thought maybe she would reach out a hand to me across the gulf between the highly educated and the instinctively educated, and give me greeting like ships that pass in the night. I wished for just a little note of reassurance that it is worth while to go on striving to find for one's family what is best in life, to have and to hold.

You know what it means to go to hear a speaker, or to take up a book or an article in this frame of mind, and sometimes the longing is gratified — the speaker or writer actually helps you.

Well, this woman to whom I was listening with all my ears began by telling us what a great country we have. She told us how many miles of railroad there are in the United States. She told us how high the Flatiron Building in New York is, and reminded

us of the wonders of invention and modern progress. She spoke of the rush and scramble for positions of honour and credit, and made it pretty plain that in this rush and scramble somebody is sure to get left, and that this somebody will be the person who lacks the higher education. She said that the world no longer recognises people who have not a college education.

There were twenty-one young people in the class, and only three or four of them could afford to go away to school. This was very pleasant for the three or four who held up their heads proudly, and their parents in the audience nodded to each other as if to say: "We 're in it, all right." I thought maybe she would say something to the rest of them, seeing that there were so many, and I knew they were sitting there with their hearts bursting with the bitterness of being thus excluded from everything worth having; but she never said a single word to them.

She did not speak a word to help the mother who sat composedly in the audience hearing her daughter's sentence read; it was

exactly as if she had dismissed us with a shrug of the shoulder.

One thing I have always noticed, and that is that when things get at their worst they're pretty sure to mend. I had been feeling about as badly as I could when I suddenly felt a delightful warmth and comfort stealing about my heart. A sudden illumination dawned upon me, and I knew why the woman who had come to talk to us was giving all she had to the people who did n't need it. It was because she did n't know any better — because she did n't know any better! She was ignorant of the fact that in a community like ours there would naturally be a large percentage of the young people who, on leaving the public schools, must consider their education, as far as tuition goes, complete, and that these were the children she should try to inspire with hope and courage, instead of coolly slamming the doors of life in their faces.

Just at this moment I looked up and caught my daughter's eye — for when a child is dismayed it always seeks its mother's eye — and I smiled and nodded to her quite

gaily, for I knew that I, alone and unassisted, could teach her, and had been teaching her from her birth, the very things that this woman with the higher education did n't know, and that they were quite as important as the things she did know, and maybe more so. One kind of ignorance is as bad as another.

This lecturer was full of little mannerisms which many speakers affect. She had a way of making a huge, architectural, twentieth-century statement and then smiling archly at the audience and asking sweetly, "And why?"

I never did like this bantering manner in a speaker. It used to be very popular in pulpit oratory. We sat up very far to the front at church when I was a child. It did seem to me that they did everything to me that they could when they were bringing me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I hated to go to church anyway. For one reason, we never had very much to wear that we were proud of. It is nice to sail up the aisle of the meeting-house if one has a new hat and coat and a

silk petticoat that rustles faintly, but there is little compensation for sitting in the front pew if your aunt wears her old Paisley shawl forever, and never in the world gets a new bonnet, and when you are in a chronic state of outgrowing your Sunday frock and are fearfully conscious of your white woolen stockings. It would be much more comforting to sit back and watch people come in and have hats and pretty collars and gloves to look at during the services. But, as I say, we sat up in front, and I used to find these questions which the preacher hurled at us very embarrassing. "Where will you be? Where will you be then?" he used to shout, seemingly at me, after he had given a particularly vivid description of the gates of heaven being closed with awful finality upon all who indulged in certain vices to which I was fatally prone. I used to get so nervous I wonder I did not blurt out some trembling answer or defence.

Well, our speaker kept asking us, "And why?" and the answer every time was: "The higher education." Everybody liked her immensely, and we all went up and she

let us shake hands with her and look at her, and then we went home.

My sister and I walked off down the village street after the lecture and did n't say much. There are few greater comforts than a good sister. You always feel a bit of restraint in your companionship with your mother, fearing a possible criticism, and in your association with your daughter you must always preserve some attitude of dignity; but you and your sister are just "pals" in all sorts of mischief, and this makes a special nearness between you.

By and by I remarked, more in soliloquy than otherwise: "I understand this person who has just addressed us is not married?" Sister turned upon me, and, with the consummate art of impersonation which is her special gift, inquired, "And why?"

We fell over against the fence then, in spite of the fact that we had on our best gowns and our white gloves because we were kin to one of the graduates, and began laughing like the "fool young 'uns" that Riley tells about:

Me an' Bud an' Minnie Belle knows a joke 'at we can't tell.

Sister and I are just plain women, who have lived in a sweet, little, old village all our lives and have just kept house and never got to go to college or any place else much. We are sorry, though, for college does n't hurt some people a bit!

Now the point I wish to make out of this, for the benefit of some woman who may be suffering, just as I was several years ago, over her inability to give her children what she considers a proper education, is that, while the college education for women is desirable — a mother cannot be too well educated — this woman who came to us fairly out of another world, and a world which we are accustomed to accept as a higher one, was lacking in something which is far more important than a college education.

As an educator she did her duty, but as a woman with a true woman's heart she missed a splendid opportunity to speak a word of wholesome comfort and cheer to the young people who must at once go out into the world to work, equipped only with youth's pathetic courage. I am aware that hers is a very fashionable attitude — this

little lifting of the shoulder in the direction of people who, smart folk think, are not worth while. But this is also a very ignorant attitude, crass and crude as any of the ideas of the uneducated.

As I listened to the self-complacent babbling of our friend of the higher education I longed to call out to her: "Stop talking — and say something!" I wanted her to tell the boys and girls that life is the great field for education and that "we are all children in the kindergarten of God," and I hoped she would remind us that the highest education is of the heart, rather than the mind.

The higher education she was telling about is a finish, but the highest education is a start. This goes very far back in the history of the family, and we should remember this, not so much that we may be able to point with pride to a good foundation for our own education, as that someone in the future may be able to trace his own favourably. The future is peculiarly ours.

I have noticed how easily some families begin to degenerate as soon as the money

for technical education fails to be forthcoming. They get discouraged and allow their children to sink into that mental commonness which is so deplorable. There is nothing to hinder people from living at the top of their mental development — even though they may be debarred from actual scholarship. The worst feature about lacking a college experience is that it often shuts the doors of what we like to call success, particularly against a young man. But I do not know whether this is real success. I knew a young fellow who was a brilliant scholar in a fine technical school. He was graduated with honours and at once got a position with a great electrical concern. I went to see him at the St. Louis Exposition one day, and found him down in a mining exhibit under an engine, black and dirty as any coal-miner. He looked worn and jaded, and, though I knew that here he had his “chance” of working up, it all seemed a little pitiable in the light of its actual workings. I could n’t help contrasting him and his tense, overstrained face with certain happy young fellows I knew at home who

had never got to go to college, but who are living well and healthily on half his salary, which, though sounding pretty big, judged by our unsophisticated village standards, was still entirely incapable of allowing him and his young wife, who was also a college graduate, to do more than browse at life in the big city.

Our public schools are constantly closing their doors against naturally bright teachers and accepting in their places narrow, inferior women because they bear the hallmark of college.

This is certainly very unwise. Any place of education, especially in these days of perfunctory living, is a narrowing place. Our modern way of living encourages slothfulness in women. The energy put forth in keeping up with society and church and club work is superficial. We rise to the occasion without the use of muscles and mind that come into play in real living. This is the criticism which may be made on places of higher education for women. They lack the quality of realness, and the higher they get the more unnatural their

atmosphere. A girl has to be grandly gifted with common sense to come out of one of them without acquiring an artificial air of culture, which is more tiresome than any one other thing on earth.

I listened to the woman speaker that night with all my ears, and by so doing learned exactly the opposite of what she was trying to teach. We may do this with much in life which is popularly accepted as good. I learned from her that schooling is not always mental development, and that education does not always cure ignorance, and that a bright woman who is determined to develop her own resources, mental, moral and physical, is not in great need of the higher education as it is looked upon by women of our speaker's type.

It is a favourite maxim of mine that the real joys of life are not for the few, but belong to the common lot. Many educated people miss them because they are looking too high. There are a lot of catch-phrases, like the "higher criticism," which are puzzling to many people. People are easily fooled by a mere change of name—especially if we call the

thing "new" or "higher" or "real." There is a yearning for what is "new" and "high" and "real." So few people can tell us in a way we can understand that new means old, and high means down close to the ground, and real means what we cannot see or touch.

Do not worry if you have n't money enough to buy your child advantages. Look about and see if you have n't something much more worth while that you can bestow without money and without price. See if you have n't faith and courage of living, patience and cheerfulness in the day's work, appreciation of all that is really fine in life and Nature, a sense of blessedness in home, a habit of living for the best that is in you. Transmit, as only a mother can, these things to your children, and your home will be a place of highest education, where all lacks of scholastic culture and training are more than atoned for, and to which in after years your child may point with pride as the finest possible Alma Mater.

## XIV

### A BIG DAY

THE word "eventless" is often applied to the life of the country woman. This is as you look at it. I know city women living in "the midst of things" whose lives are very humdrum. Nothing is so dull as luxury and society, the theatre, even travel, soon become monotonous unless a person is constituted for enjoying life, and in this case environment has little to do with it. People keep busy with pleasure-seeking as we toilers do with work, but I doubt that their activity holds the abiding flavour we find in actual work which makes us hungry and tired and sleepy, and makes food and rest and sleep so good.

I know a woman in whose life three crises fraught with intense excitement arrive regularly every day and have done so for forty years. These events are breakfast, dinner,

and supper, and she charges upon them just as valiantly to-day as she did forty years ago.

At eleven o'clock on a summer morning she starts for the kitchen like a war-horse sniffing the battle from afar. She rushes, she bustles, she gets hot and flurried; nobody's life is safe who interrupts her, and woe be to the cat that peeps in through the screen-door, or the child who proposes making a little pie from a bit of extra dough.

The woman has no time for such things; she is absorbed in the delightful exigency of achieving her ideal.

Dare we say that her life is narrow when her heart and hands are so full? She is happy, she loves life and would hate to close her eyes on the faithful range and the shiny clean, coffee-pot as you and I would hate to say good-bye to music and sunshine and laughter and the delectable affinities with our fellow-men. It is mere arrogance to assume that your life is fuller than that of another merely because you have a different way of filling it.

If this woman thinks of me at all it is

to regard me as a trifle unbalanced, and to wish, for the sake of my family, that I were a bit steadier. My worst enemy must admit that when I brace up to tussle with the stern realities of life I can do pretty well. I can keep house, cook, wash, iron, 'tend garden and poultry, patch, darn, sew, make pickles, can fruit, cure meat and do dozens of other things.

A long list of accomplishments I call this, and I am proud of having mastered them. I want every other woman who is mistress of them to realise that they are accomplishments and that there is not necessarily anything narrowing or eventless in learning them. But if there is one thing I am thankful for it is for not being steady.

It is taken for granted here at home that we have three fair meals a day, but it is also understood that nobody is going to break her neck cooking them.

That is n't my way. The mere accomplishment of the housework would not fill my life. If you like other things beside your trade, learn your trade so well that you can follow it mechanically. Women

often fail here for want of concentrated application. They think they do not like their work, and keep pulling away from it instead of learning it so well that it will seem easy.

The point in housekeeping is a general effect of wholesomeness and comfort. Don't fret over detail. Don't worry if a pie sizzles out or the "grain" of the bread is not quite so fine as it was last week — leave that to our friend who cares for nothing else. These things would be dull to you and to me, and we must avoid dullness.

In childhood and girlhood I was never dull — I had a talent for making things happen — and the years in which there was not time for dullness began very early in my life.

It is not such a dreadful state of affairs when a young couple who have joined hands to go together into Eden find themselves, instead, in the plain, workaday world, where it is toil or starve. The situation has its charm, and though my young face was often haggard and strained, my days of premature responsibility, of deprivation and dis-

appointment and fulfilment and achievement were infinitely better than dull days. I laugh and cry over them as I look back, and wonder how such a "slip of a girl," "light of foot and prone to laughter," ever got through with them.

My brother-in-law, the judge, who, when court is not in session, likes to sit listening to the women when they are having a "peelin'," asks me two or three times a year to tell again about my "big day."

Do my readers know what a "peelin'" is? They used to be popular when home-dried apples were a household necessity — but the kind I speak of is a different thing altogether. I do not think a "peelin'" is very ill-natured when we admit that it is one, and when we preface our especial flaying alive with the remark, "Now, I *like* Mrs. Blank——"

Among other blessings I have a lot of bright kinspeople. Some people are for being the bright, particular star in a somewhat nebulous firmament of admiring sisters and cousins and aunts — but I like the appreciation of people who are as "smart"

as I am better than the fondness of foolish folk with little discrimination.

So I am flattered when the judge asks me to tell once more the story of what I call the "big day" in the annals of my housekeeping.

It was a July day, and I rose with the lark, remembering the big ironing I had sprinkled down the night before and also that there was bread to bake. Our ironings were large in those days, for the little girls must have clean frocks every day, and I like a white tablecloth above everything, and, besides, we had a guest staying at the house. I had no maid and the girls were too little to help much. The ironing must be finished by noon, as I was invited to "assist" at a reception that afternoon, and it could not go over until to-morrow, because that was Wednesday, the day my blackberries were engaged for.

A woman cannot give up a party when she is young, even if her legs are about to drop off from "tiredness." The joy of swishing about in one's silk skirts, handling dainty cups and plates, and smiling benignly upon

Mrs. So-and-So, who is furious at not being chosen to assist, is not to be foregone.

I knew well that if I was to get to that beloved social function (what woman does n't love them?) I must let no grass grow under my feet, so when the family and our guest came down to breakfast the bread was mixed and set to rise, the chickens fed, and the clotheshorse showed a pretty fair array of neatly smoothed garments. When the irons are hot, and the starch does n't stick, and one gets into the swing of it, one can turn off piece after piece with considerable celerity.

I made a flying trip to the garden after the breakfast dishes were washed, and while the irons were "heating up" again, for vegetables for dinner, and found, when I returned, that "the man," having mistaken the date, had brought my eight gallons of blackberries. I was an optimistic little soul, so I kept the berries, thinking to finish the ironing and bread-baking and dinner-cooking in intervals of canning and pouring jelly into glasses.

Our guest was a privileged house-friend

who stayed with us several weeks out of each year and who liked nothing better than to loaf around the kitchen when I was at work. I like men loafing around the kitchen well enough, not being like some women who simply “fly to pieces” if the “men-folks” come around the cook-stove; but there are certain times when the masculine element is not especially desirable.

However, our friend was in a loquacious mood that day — he usually was, being a scholar of the old time when learning did not grow on trees — so he insisted on sitting in the kitchen expounding the Darwinian theory and spouting long passages of the Iliad, sometimes in the English of Pope, again in the original — which was “all Greek” to me. I liked the odes of Horace better, as I could understand some Latin words. He had only got fairly started on

Integer vitæ sceleris que purus  
Non eget Mauris jaculis neque arcu —

when a fearful hubbub arose outside, and eight or ten youngsters, all talking at once appeared, bearing my youngest on an impromptu litter known as a hand saddle. Her

face was covered with blood, and the only assurance I had that she was not fatally injured lay in the shrieks she was emitting.

It was, after all, only a cut over the eye administered by a croquet-mallet in the hands of a visiting infant. We feared it might leave a scar, but it did n't. Our guest left off the classics and helped me dress the wound, and I had just finished cuddling the victim of this casualty and convinced her that she had a remnant of life left, when the blackberries boiled over on the irons and I smelt the bread scorching in the oven. It is a miracle I did not scald my hands moving the kettle.

Someway we had dinner, but I began to see that there is a limit to the housekeeper's powers, be she never so clever, so I explained to my "men-folks" as I covered up the table leaving dishes and all just as they were (I washed up the pots and pans as I went, getting dinner), that they must get supper at a restaurant downtown, as I never could get home from that party with strength enough to cook it.

I sent the children to their grandmother

(happy children, none ever had a lovelier grandmother!) and hustled into my Sunday gown. There is only one kind of woman who can "hustle into her Sunday gown" on a hot day and feel all right, and that is a woman with curly hair, which needs no elaborate dressing, but just a little twist. Fortunately, I have a woolly head, and though my hair is in no sense a "crowning glory," it is a comfort when one is in a hurry — two hairpins will hold it up!

The reception was at a beautiful country home not far from town. I was happy in the excitement of meeting the large company. There is, in every woman's soul, a longing for a glimpse of the thing we call society. And do not, country sisters, let anyone make you believe that there is such a vast difference between our country parties and the "swell" affairs of the city. If we are a bit boisterous and lacking in decorum they have deficiencies quite as lamentable. They are affected and cold, and often eat things we would n't feed to the chickens.

I forgot all about the work of the morning,

and my dear little girl with the "shiner" her playmate had given her, and the ghastly dinner-table covered up awaiting my return. Sister and I drove happily homeward "talking it over," which is always the best part of any entertainment, but I was brought abruptly back from decorations and costumes to plain business when I saw my husband and our guest placidly seated on our front porch. They had forgotten my instructions about supper and were waiting for me to come and cook it for them.

I pass over supper and the washing of the accumulated dishes, but just as I was finishing them a gay party of town friends arrived to spend the evening.

They were scarcely seated when a quiet little neighbour from across the fields, not knowing I had company, appeared with her three babies, one an infant in arms and two adorable toddlers both under five. To be sure, these babies should have been in bed, for it was late twilight, but my heart goes out to the young mother who, when the busy day is done, feels the need of a little visiting.

It was not the first situation I had faced that day, so I put my gay friends to playing an absorbing game while I sat on the porch and entertained the little mother, talking, and nursing the two elder babies.

When the mother rose to go, the second baby, being tired and sleepy, refused to be put down, crying dismally, and declaring in inarticulate speech that she could n't walk.

My mother had by this time arrived, bringing home my own children, so I deputed her as temporary hostess while, groaning inwardly, I shouldered the tired, sleepy, little youngster and trudged home with my friend.

When I returned my guests were still absorbed in their game, so I slipped upstairs to hear the children say their prayers, and when I came down mother met me with an anxious face. She had been to the kitchen and seen the clotheshorse, the baking of bread, the cans of berries and the twenty or so glasses of jelly. "My dear," she said with gentle seriousness, "I think you have had a big day." I sat down on

the lower step and burst out laughing. And, if you will believe me, I was n't a particle tired or a mite sleepy!

Yes, it was a "big day," but it certainly was n't a dull one — and from dull days, with the remembering sunshine marking the slow-going hours that lead to nothing, may all young women be delivered!

Many people having home and loved ones close around them let dulness creep in, when by just a little effort at congeniality, a little loosening of the tension of duty, a little yielding to a sense of humour, all might be sweet and good.

I hope we may be able to convince mistaken people that the life of the woman who does her own work is not necessarily dull. Dull people are born, not made, and who was it who said: "People who don't like the country because there is so little going on are those in whose heads there is less going on than even in the country"? There is always something going on. Life is going on. The universe is going on. They are dull people who require constant distraction and the over-entertainment which has be-

come a habit with 'society' people is indeed a "dreary agitation of the dust."

The life of the country woman is full of days such as I have described. Let her be thankful for them and keep her interest in them just as they are, and she will be to the end immune from the evil days that have no pleasure in them.

## XV

### THE GOOD AND EVIL OF BOOKS AS THEY PERTAIN TO WOMEN'S LIVES

MY "BIG days" of housework were generally succeeded by big days of equally strenuous mental activity. I would read and read and read till my eyes were blurred and things about me seemed unreal—intangible. I read everything and some of the books came pretty nearly ruining me before I came out in the far side of their pollution and shook myself free in the clear atmosphere of plain common sense and inspired reason. There are so many bad books—useless, inconsequent books—it is difficult to separate the wheat from the tares.

I can remember when a novel was never spoken of without a little lowering of the voice, and I have watched with much interest the change of heart that has taken place regarding fiction.

Ours was a reading family, a rather unusual thing in a little Indiana village, and thrifty neighbours criticised us for it. We read Dickens and Thackeray at an early day and were devoted to the old-fashioned poets. Mother read to us children "The Tales of the Alhambra" and "The Arabian Nights," but I very early discovered that there was an element in fiction that must be kept from the young. Why did mother lock "Jane Eyre" in the top bureau-drawer? There was a mystery about it, and something told me it was a nice mystery. It was like the things on the top shelf of the three-cornered cupboard in the dining-room — one could never reach up there, though little sister steadied the high-backed chair till she was purple in the face while I climbed up at the risk of life and limb.

I was not much more than six when I was discovered reading "The Hidden Hand" in the old "New York Ledger." Uncle had, among other vices which sorely tried his respectable Presbyterian spouse, a liking for Saturday evening story papers. After it was known that I was reading them they

were barred from the house. I was so disconsolate over this decree that uncle, who was fatally "good-hearted," took to hiding the papers in a cunning little hole in the haymow where I could find them and read the beloved stories when mother thought I was at play.

How well I remember those delightful hours, nestled in the warm, soft hay! Verily, I "ate and drank the precious words"!

I was well along in "The Haunted Husband, or Lady Chetwynd's Spectre," when I was detected. But mother was wise. She did not take the story away from me, but insisted I finish it in the house where I read other stories.

As I remember them, these stories were not of unsound moral sentiment, for, though fiction was regarded with disapproval, even the cheapest of it was of a higher moral tone than that of much which now appears in high-class periodicals which print stories of illicit love-affairs, of chance meetings between young people in the streets, of clever burglarising, suggesting to young readers how it may be done. Atheistic doctrine is

freely aired in popular stories, and the general tone of our latest literature ends on the keynote of "what's the use of being good?"

The married flirt — whose great prototype was Becky Sharp — has been idealised until a very attractive model has been set up for our childless young married women. Our modern writers have not been sincere nor clever enough to disclose to us as Thackeray did the lovelessness and actual heart-loneliness which is the inevitable heritage of such a woman, but have shown her to us with diabolical art as a piquant creature fairly justified in her moral lightness.

The girl whose heart is her guide is another popular heroine. I knew a little girl who, under the influence of that consummate little hypocrite, Elsie Dinsmore, was always on the lookout for some occasion that would justify her in setting up her "conscience" against something the family wished to do. She generally managed to cast a gloom over the picnic, break up the Virginia reel, or spoil whatever innocent sport was going on, and she actually acquired a morbid disposition by seeking for "conscience tests" such as

fill up the affected and unhealthy pages of the "Elsie books" which so many religious people admire.

The majority of our modern novels are injurious to the young, but I think the people who are in most danger from reading poisonous fiction are young married women, whose minds are beginning really to develop.

Among other things which have come to woman with the "awakening" of the woman movement is a determination to be courageous about truth. Much of the over-reading from which a certain class is suffering comes from this morbid thirst for truth and knowledge, and many women devour light literature under the impression that they are arriving at a sort of sophistication.

When it comes to truth there are just a few things that we know for certain, and we generally learn them from the lips of a wise mother or grandmother. The only fiction which is worth reading is such as accepts as incontrovertible the simple, great truths of life and goes ahead and tells us a good sound story.

The books which deal in little hair-split-

tings of right and wrong, discuss platonic love, expose the trials and question the duties of the married state, and dwell upon morbid subjects of "sex interest," are either chosen with deliberate purpose by people who need material and lack inspiration, or else they emanate from the undisciplined minds of women who have some facility with the pen, but who lack real genius and have little proper feeling for art. The publishers are to blame that such productions ever see the light of day, but women who read them and discuss them are quite as culpable.

Women read these books in ignorance of the great laws of the body and its relation to the divine. They are strangely blinded to facts when it comes to literature and art. Take, for instance, a book like "The Masquerader," which sold so famously, though there was not an original note in it from cover to cover. Do the young women who so eagerly devoured it realise that its only charm, aside from being in a sense well written, was the propinquity of a man and a woman who were not husband and wife?

Do they see the indelicacy of the whole situation, and know that all these books are just unholy tamperings with the institution of marriage and the family?

At a certain age we are prone to believe that there is a new wisdom for us. The world suddenly stands tiptoe to explain something it has withheld from others. We are about to know why things are thus. Many of our modern novels start out with some hint of explaining this thing to us. We read in a sort of excitement, only to find at the end that the writer has shown us the world in a horrible mess and given us no remedy for it. Many young women who have not been carefully taught do get a sort of understanding of human nature and its weaknesses from fiction of this sort, but they are very unfortunate in doing so, and we pity them as we pity children who first learn of the mystery of life and birth from the lips of vulgar playmates rather than at the knees of a wise, kind mother.

Woman, who holds the highest, most responsible office in the world, can never afford to blink her eyes at truth. Let her

be wise. Let her be equipped with the most consummate understanding of things as they are. Let her know the truth about love and understand that there is no platonic relation between a virile man and a good-looking woman. Let her know how easily the finer chords of sex are touched in the nobler animal by a sense of art. Let her know that such knowledge is a safeguard for warm friendship between man and woman, and that all discussion of such subjects in novels is a transgression of the moral law. Let her know that it is through ignorance of these great truths which are withheld from women by unwise teachers who like to place sentiment ahead of plain judgment, that lovely woman often "stoops to folly," and that it is in ignorance that she often reads what appeals to her baser nature, failing to perceive that the "erotic" novel lays bare our inner sanctuary with a desecration only less shameless than the "religious" novel which trades upon our holiest emotions and places our typified Redeemer on the list of characters in fiction.

The kind of knowledge it pays woman

to have is such quiet knowledge, and it is never best to prate about it. I want her to get back from her position of daring and reaching out for experiences to the post at the home fireside where she is so badly needed. The modern novel — or perhaps any novel — goes far to carry out the idea that the domestic woman is a fool.

Even those which try to set up a contrast between the good and the bad woman usually succeed in making the good heroine “faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,” and ascribing all the vivacity and charm to the most immoral woman in the book. Perhaps this is because it is seldom given to us to describe the dearest and best. If anyone asked you to give a proper appreciation of your mother would you not soon become inarticulate and end by saying: “Oh, she was just mother!”?

I heard a fashionable woman at a reception remark in answer to the question as to why Mrs. Humphry Ward persists in giving us immoral women as heroines in her books: “She must, if she wants her books to sell. Good women are seldom interesting.” This

was a reflection of popular sentiment as imbibed from the modern novel. It was the expression of the "reading public" in its huge lack of perception, jaded as it is with over-entertainment and blasé with cheap sentiment.

In answer to this crass remark another woman said, sighing a little: "Well, maybe they are not, but I would rather be good than interesting!" I wanted to shake her for the foolish admission that she felt she must accept as good literature what came to her from a famous writer, even though her own judgment with divine insistence kept suggesting its falseness and impropriety. It is exactly in this way, by not thinking for ourselves, that women so often fail to discriminate between what is really strong and big in literature and what is merely spurious and vulgar.

When I heard the woman say that good women are seldom interesting I hastily summoned to my memory the three brightest, most companionable and certainly most beautiful women I have ever known, and found that they were also the best women I have

ever known. They had woman's exquisite charm, her constancy, her patience, combined with man's honour, his humour and his courage. I was never dull in their society, though none of their lives would have made a popular novel. Cleverly set down, however, they might have turned out one of those rare books like "Cranford," "Rebecca," or "Elizabeth and Her German Garden."

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder; so the charm of the book is in the mind of the reader — it is for you to say which shall seem most "interesting" to you: a story like those mentioned above, or a book bristling with immoralities told in language suggestive enough to rouse the flagging sense of interest in minds steeped and dulled in sensational details of rotten society.

Do not be confused if you are not "up" on all the recent books, or ashamed if somebody asks you if you have read Mrs. So-and-So's latest and you have never heard of it. Much reading and preparing of club papers are done by women who would far better be joining in children's games or cooking

something really good and "homey" for them to eat. "Like what you like" is one of my favourite mottoes, and I believe it as applied to reading, eating, and living.

One day I missed my mother from the kitchen and sitting-room, and after searching for her through the garden and henhouse I finally found her upstairs lying in the middle of the bed, a book in one hand and a big, ripe apple in the other.

"Go 'way," she commanded, waving the apple at me, "and don't bother me — I'm having a good time! I am reading 'Wild Bill, or the Heroes of the Plains'!"

I retired, choking with laughter — mother was the brightest woman I ever knew and her taste in literature was absolutely unerring.

It was my mother who, with caustic kindness showed me the plain, unvarnished facts of life, and then with divine art taught me to clothe them with the ideal, to find beauty for ashes, joy for renunciation. Her mind was its own tribunal, and she saw the foolishness of all attempts to change the manifest destiny of woman or uproot the foundations of morality for any new doctrine

making divorce respectable or free love a thing to be condoned.

So she swept aside, as all bright and good women should, the inconsequent, the deleterious and the unpleasant in literature, choosing restful tales of quiet English farm-life, strong stories of travel and adventure, true-hearted love stories of the nobler type, and now and again a yarn like "Wild Bill" for some mood of humorous relaxation.

Out here in the country among farmers' wives and village women there is never unlimited time for reading — and that is a good thing! It is much better to be busy than intellectual. Intellect among women has come to be a drug on the market, but the domestic virtues remain above par.

The book has its place on mother's work-table and she who neglects it is reprehensible, but when we read let us choose something pleasant and uplifting, and eschew the morbid and vulgar in our reading as in our conversation.

## XVI

### THE SIN OF TRYING TO BE TOO GOOD

A VERY dear friend of mine said to me the other day with a cadence of gentle melancholy in her tone. "I have very few pleasures in this world." I glanced quickly up at her to see if she was consciously "putting on" or if she really thought that what she said was true. The tie between us is of the sort that is thicker than water and I would n't hesitate a moment to invite her to come off her perch, or even to assist her to descend by forcible means, if I thought it would do any good. My sisters and I were brought up in a holy horror of "putting on," and were always on the lookout for the slightest hint of affectation in voice or manner. Our wits were sharpened to the detection of the faintest tinge of sentimentalism — the merest swaying of the form in walking — the most infinitesimal wag of head — the slightest

suggestion of taking ourselves seriously or making the most of a situation.

We dreaded the laughter and sarcasm that were the sure retribution of posing — so we held to plain facts until it really amounted to a fault. Plain dealing can be overdone, and truth itself employed unnecessarily. However, I saw that the woman believed what she said — but I laughed anyway — openly and derisively. We were on the way home from a session of bridge whist and were going for a drive the next afternoon; the next day after that was the euchre club; some friends had telephoned that they were coming in to spend the evening: the poor soul who had no pleasures was hastening home to strike a light to the wood fire in her big, pleasant hall, to draw a pitcher of cider and put it in the refrigerator for her guests. Her girl was getting supper; nobody was sick; the winter coal laid in; her cellar full to overflowing with good things for the coming winter. And so I laughed at her because she had so few pleasures in this world.

I never did admire the attitude of the

cross-bearing child, or the idea of being a pilgrim and a stranger in this vale of tears. As for me I am so native to my element that everything appeals to me with a sort of pleasure. As we walked along the street that afternoon a thousand little consciousnesses thrilled me with a sense of pleasure. The clear sunset, the fresh September breeze, with just the hint of wood smoke on its breath, the rustle of the leaves on the maple trees that make our town a sylvan home, with all the suggestions the word implies—the long vista of the street under the arching branches, the flight of blackbirds coming home to roost, the familiar houses wherein dwell the neighbours (and every one around as dear as a relation!) the motion of walking, the function of breathing—the myriads of memories and realisations, reminiscent and anticipatory, folded in the convolutions of the brain and faintly expressing themselves in the sensations of the hour.

I wondered how the woman had come to let these things lose their effect upon her—and then it suddenly came to me that she had done so by trying to be good! How

many people have done the same thing, let the long list of martyrs, religious fanatics, inmates of monasteries, convents and lunatic asylums reply! I am of the earth, earthy, and I am glad of it. This world is my home while I stay in it, and, to tell the truth, I do not care if that is forever and ever. Let me change to a beech tree or a quaking aspen, or a red bird or a fish, so I may keep this joy when the wind blows and the rain falls and the sun shines on the ripples of the creek, or sinks in a sea of gold behind the scant fringe of our fast-thinning Indiana woods.

As a race we are given to hypochondria. It was a part of the religion of our ancestors. We were to taboo pleasure — to take up our cross — in short, to make ourselves a terror to the young and a burden to ourselves in the mistaken idea that we were gaining something by it. Women are particularly given to this form of martyrdom. They accept the cares of life as trials, when they might just as well make joys of them, and they show a servile respect to grief that must be trying to Him who sends sorrows

as blessings to such as will have them so. There is a vast difference in the way grief comes to us — but it is a belief of mine that the more strongly we allow our element to claim us, the closer we live to the life of the body, the easier it is to bear the natural griefs that flesh is heir to. For this reason it is all important to keep to the simple joys of living and loving — let the little daily cares — the seemingly inconsequent things, be dear to you, and let life itself be dear to you — as dear as it will — never spurn its pleasures, and above all, know when you have them. Realise your blessings before it is too late — and never say you have few pleasures so long as a year of youth is left and you love anybody in the world or anybody in the world loves you. Youth means much besides mere youngness — it is a thing we may keep or lose.

I am an 'unorthodox soul who does n't go to church, an unconventional person who is always transgressing social rules and customs, a lax housekeeper, working by fits and starts, a somewhat indiscreet talker, given to plain speech and open confession.

The truth is, however, I am not needed at church. If I were, I should go. I never went to a revival meeting in my life, but what a paralysis fell upon the spirit of the occasion. Not a conversion, not a testimony, not a hand-shaking, or a walk-around takes place while I am inside the doors. There is always a painful and perspiring effort on the part of the evangelist. Embarrassing silences come in which one can hear a pin drop. Nobody rises for prayer, not a sinner goes to the mourner's bench, the meeting stands at a deadlock — though the night before there was a great awakening. I am always seized with the idea that it is up to me to do something, but I don't quite know what it is. It would be insincere for me to rise for prayer; my voice is too much cracked by long disuse to raise a hymn on a sudden and risk carrying it till the others recover from their surprise and join in one by one.

I feel a sympathy for the hero of the old story about the stranger who happened in when the preacher was discoursing on the sheep and the goats. "And who will be the goats?" he demanded in old-style pulpit

oratory — “and who will be the goats?” The silence after the reiteration of this question was so prolonged and impressive that the stranger, being of an obliging disposition, rose and remarked: “Well, mister, rather than have the performance stop, I’ll be a goat.” I always feel an intense willingness to be a goat or anything else that will help matters along, but I have n’t the talent for it some way, and once out in the open air with my limbs freed from the terrifying limitations of the pew in which there is no opportunity for action except to rise while singing the last verse or when the preacher asks all who want to go to heaven to stand up, I decide for the hundredth time, that browsing out along the highways and hedges is my best chance.

Not that I do not respect church-going people or the sentiment that takes them there. I was never for carrying coals to Newcastle — there are so many good women who go to church — one less is scarcely noticed. If I were a man, now, and could make a spot of tweed or cheviot among the silks and voiles, I think I should go, but

then there are so many fine things I would do if I were a man, it really seems a pity I was n't one.

In regard to being good, what a joke it will be on me if at the end I find my philosophy wrong, and that I made a mistake in merely being thankful and appreciative, and in accepting the little gratuities of life as blessings and being glad over them! What if I have to go back and learn it all over again and know that my delight in every wayside weed and flower was a pagan joy — my rapture in the sunshine only a passion which we leave behind — my being happy, like the apples, when the south wind blows, merely a sensuous response to the call — what call? How faint and far — how reminiscent and prophetic — ah, we cannot know for certain which part of us is nearest God or when we are spurning the divine!

At any rate, I am convinced that there is no virtue in having few pleasures. Everything is a pleasure that belongs properly to our element. We should be normal souls, not struggling against our destiny, and as such the functions of life are naturally pleas-

urable and we should not despise them. I was getting dinner the other day, when it suddenly struck me what a jolly thing it was to be doing. I was hungry, for one thing, and that made it better. And it was cool enough to make the kitchen fire not ungrateful. I had rushed down at a quarter past eleven to scare up something for dinner. I made a little peach cobbler, fried a skilletful of tomatoes, cooked mashed potatoes, fried ham with cream gravy, made soda biscuits, and put a dish of crisp white celery and a shaky mould of my new crab-apple jelly on the table.

I have a mania for waiting till the last minute and then racing like mad to get the meal on the table. This is contrary to all authorities on housekeeping — and maybe that is why I like to do it. I never could plan ahead for days in advance. I am sure I should n't enjoy things to eat if they were not prepared on the impulse of the moment, but as I say, it suddenly occurred to me what a fine state of affairs it was to be hungry and have something to cook and some loved ones to share the meal with one! There

was pleasure in every motion of flying around the kitchen, satisfaction in being able in a few minutes to evolve a good meal from the raw material, delight in the warmth and fragrance of the room, with the clear sunlight and crisp autumnal air outside. Would any woman who can do this dare to say she has few pleasures?

But aside from these homely delights — that we should all allow to be as dear to us as they wish to be — there are so many others. I am just woman enough to like to go to a tea or reception, or large evening company or card party, or picnic, or anything else that comes along. Here in a very “poky” little village, far from great cities and social centres, my friends and I have been free to have fun in our own way, and we have had it. The gypsy picnics we used to have remain bright spots in our memories. I was detailed, with two dignified gentlemen, to fry the potatoes. Later, my sister-in-law and I quarrelled over frying the eggs, and finally we all sat down to a feast for the gods — seasoned by hunger and the novelty of the occasion. Often,

four good cronies took long afternoon drives and spread our little supper table on the shorn grass of the meadows, where the long shadows of little thickets on the west of us stretched canopies of shade for us. I took my samovar and made coffee, and between you and me, the poor lady who has not many pleasures was always one of our number.

We have an old horse who paces in harness, and is so lazy we can scarcely beat him out of a walk, but when one puts the saddle on him quite early on an autumn morning and strikes out the big road, he really has some pretty fair gaits. He can "rack" a little and has a nice little lope — if one were not a bit afraid he might stumble — but why cross the bridge, or go over the horse's head before the time comes? All the blisses of a lifetime are crowded into an autumn morning ride.

I believe in many pleasures as a safeguard to morality. I doubt the virtue of allowing seeming duty to intervene between one and a personal pleasure. Much preaching has instilled into our minds the idea that it is

our duty to make other people happy. I doubt that it is as much our duty as to make ourselves happy. Happiness is infectious, and happy people spread the contagion. Some of the most disagreeable people I know are devoted to the idea of making others happy. To this end they are always hauling out some impossible person and making him wretched by trying to mix him up with people who are not congenial. They are always frowning upon other people's pleasures, always reminding them of neglected duty. They are opposed to gossip, and look askance at gaiety, and their patronage is fatal to the young, for it places any person whom they seek out in the light of a beneficiary. I firmly believe if they put in the time having high jinks just for their own amusement, they would do more good in the world. For the gay and bright need not be unkind, nor can the happy be selfish or the selfish happy. It is useless to undertake to make people happy by being persistently kind to them. If they are bright they will be happy in their own way; if they are dull you cannot improve them. They will only

demand more than you have to give and turn sulky if you do not instantly produce it.

No woman who lives in a sweet home in a shady country town with pleasant friends around her, with books to read and horses to drive and good things to eat, and work to do, has a right to say she has few pleasures. We all have our griefs, our heartaches, our woes, but we should not live in them. One day at a time is the way to live. (Oh, irrevocable days if we could have you back again!) As for me the fast fleeting days hold so many pleasures I scarcely know which to seize as it hurries along! *Eheu fugaces!* — and the day is done! I am glad, however, I went with my friend to drive yesterday and that we stole the peaches that hung so temptingly over the roadway. To be sure, they were clings and a trifle sour, and I got peach fuzz down my neck, but how we laughed when I rolled down the grassy bank with the bough that had broken in my hands, and how warm the sunlight was, and how blue the hills in the distance looked! Tomorrow may hold another laugh like that — who knows?

## XVII

### REFLECTIONS OF A GRANDMOTHER

Oh, child world: After this world—just as when  
I found you first sufficed  
My soulmost need—if I found you again,  
With all my childish dreams so realised,  
I should not be surprised.

I AM so glad of the advent of a little child into our somewhat grown up family circle. I say somewhat grown up, because we are none of us very staid and sober, though some of us have reached the half century mark. At any rate it is always a good thing for people to have a little child to lead them into the kingdom of Heaven—which just means love if people only knew it. Well, if a little child cannot lead us into this blessed land nothing can; we are absolutely hopeless and hardened if we can resist following little feet and tiny clinging hands into the realm that childhood glorifies.

One of the resplendent gifts of childhood is a willingness to share its joy with the whole world. Exclusiveness, that diabolical quality which so many grown people cultivate, is not inherent in the human race. A child is born free and equal as far as he knows. He is ready to join hands with anything that can run, or laugh, or sing, or dance, or play, white or black, straight or crooked, four-footed or biped, it is all one to him, just so the creature is alive and gifted with motion.

It is astonishing how very early a child will take notice of little children. I have begun to tell the most extravagant tales about my grandson. Already I detect quiet glances passing between the other members of the family when I launch out in praises of the infant phenomenon. I declare I do not exaggerate, but they all believe that I do, so I might as well "make it seven" while I am about it. At any rate, allowing much for my imagination, which is vivid at all times, I insist that the child did notice little children and turn his head to gaze upon them with a strange intentness when he was — well, I really am afraid to say how old.

Speaking of this quality of imagination. All my life I have been accused of imagining things, but have I really done so? Is there not, perhaps, a world, visible to me, but hidden from many? Kipling speaks of the "egg of colour," which only a few can see. I hope he knows what he means by "egg"—and doubtless he does—but, though I do not, I am sure I see colours that the majority of people do not see. There are shades of pink and mauve on fallow fields and prismatic effects in winter landscapes which I am sure escape the "casual eye." For the casual eye is so willing for things to escape it—just as the casual ear is. "Eyes have they, but they do not see, and ears, but they hear not." This capacity for not hearing and seeing is the special gift of the young when they first begin to imagine themselves grown up, and much thought of by them at a certain age. Their eyes are fixed upon some glittering future which they are to arrive at—some way—meanwhile, nothing "around here" is worth looking at. I had known grown folk who held themselves in this attitude.

We never know how early a child begins to think, and I am persuaded there is a vast difference in children in this regard, I often hear people say: "Oh, I was only four or five years old when that happened. I can't remember about it!" Dear me! how much of life I had lived when I was four or five years old. All the acquaintance I was ever to have with my own father was made before I was five. The strongest, plainest recollection I carry of my dear, quaint, strong-minded aunt, who meant so much to my childhood, was painted upon my memory when I was four. The indelible impression of a régime long passed over and mostly, now, forgotten, was made before I was four. I knew the irrevocableness of death and the thrilling face of tragedy, the gaunt visage of worry and had sensed some of the mystery of life and birth before I was five. I knew that Santa Claus did not come down the chimney, and that the stork did not bring little brother, and that everybody one meets is not necessarily a friend — and, oh — such lots of things before I was five. Besides, I could read, and I had

fallen in love with my cousin, who was a bachelor of thirty-five. Really, when I think of it I was a woman with a history at five. So, it is no wonder I attribute strange ideas and early appreciation to the very young.

But when we are very young we have a strange belief in the kindly purpose of life, which no amount of trouble can destroy, and even privation and suffering cannot quite extinguish. We have a talent for happiness, and it is this that makes us of such inestimable value to our elders. We communicate to them, in spite of themselves, some of the joy of living. I have known people who sternly forbade their children to bring them this happy sense of childhood. Some people are hopelessly grown up — especially some women. A man is nearly always ready to allow a child to lead him back to “toyland, toyland, little girl and boy land” — but I have seen women with compressed lips and grave faces guarding their freshly cleaned houses against any invasion of the play world, and keeping themselves rigorously apart from any relaxation into the nonsense

that a child naturally loves, and which I verily believe is of divine origin.

I do not doubt I was dreadfully criticised for allowing my children to "take the house" when they were growing up — and I declare I suppose I was too lenient. I look back upon times when the visitor could scarcely have ploughed his way through the play-things, the harnessed-up chairs, the palanquins made of chairs facing each other and draped in shawls and padded up with pillows, the dolls' beds made on turned-down chairs with pillows on them, the horses made from chairs with side-saddles on them, the railway trains made of chairs with the rocking chair in front for an engine, the houses made from chairs overturned to mark the boundaries of parlour, dining-room and kitchen, stretching quite across the sitting-room floor and offering a formidable obstacle to anyone who might possibly wish to cross the room. But we did not have many visitors — and we did have the children — and I declare, in looking back at the way I spoiled them, I really scarcely regret it!

I remember one time my little daughter and her friends were rehearsing for a play which they had adapted from "Little Women." They wanted a room all to themselves, so I let them have my spare bedroom, the largest bedroom in the house. They decided to have the play there and proceeded to erect a stage with curtains. While they were busy planning the stage settings, our neighbours trimmed up their fir trees. It occurred to the children that these huge branches from the fir trees would be just the thing to fix up the witch's grotto. So they all "fell to" and dragged the big fir branches upstairs — and I allowed them to do it. For weeks our house was torn up in preparation for that play and the spare room was a melee of fir branches, curtains, wigs, jumbled furniture and all sorts of stage properties.

One Saturday morning a friend and I were reading German in the library, when the villain in the play rehearsal going on above got his just dues and fell dead with a dull thud. A smothered wail, which had none of the stage quality in it, reached us

a moment later and we knew that the young actress had made her demise too realistic and the fall had hurt, no matter how fine it had been from an artistic point of view. How we laughed — and how many years were added to our lives by that laugh!

I suppose that all children have not the passion for playing which mine had, or which I, as a child, reveled in. Indeed, I have seen children who did not know how to play, but surely it is very unfortunate for them and they must miss much out of life. Our children not only delighted in playing, but also in making us play with them. I look back upon evenings of their childhood as to a land of strange enchantment and remember that all seemed real and quite worth while to me, just as it did to them. It seems to me it was quite as much fun for grandmother, aunty, and me to hold a whispered confab and decide which we would be, an elephant, a bear, or a kangaroo, as it ever was in childhood, and the suspense when we asked them which of these animals they would rather come home on was really quite thrilling.

Their favourite playmate was their uncle who weighed over two hundred pounds. If they could persuade him to prostrate himself and let them climb over him or ride on his back, their cup of joy was full. I used not to mind these romps, except that I always wondered if somebody would n't be killed. One thrilling feature of the entertainment was having him toss the children up over his head and let go of them. They always made him promise that he would let go of them. This feature received a check, however, when one night, he gave an unusually big toss and the little girl hit the ceiling with a sharp bump, which stunned her and scared her uncle out of his wits.

Though the grown-ups have a sense of delight in children's romps and games which almost brings them to childhood again, there is a celestial joy of being a child which I think can never quite return to us, though love for a little child brings us very near to it. At my grandmother's home there was a little square plat of grassy back-door yard which was the scene of a peculiar transfiguration of my childhood. On summer even-

ings when the moon rose at sunset we used to play games here in this quaint little court, which was formed by the angle of the house on two sides, the grape arbour and milk-house on another, the other boundary being the cow lot fence. There was about this little place the peculiar sweetness of absolute cleanliness with the artistic touch of the sweet-scented honeysuckle peeping around the corner of the house and a bench with blooming and sweet-scented things in boxes, portulaca, heliotrope, rose geranium, and lavender not far away from the dining-room door. I am so glad I can remember how I felt as my bare feet flew over the soft green grass — the lilt and spring of my little body in the elasticity of perfect freedom and health.

I wish some great artist like Corot could have seen us and caught for some immortal canvas the sweet, unconscious picture. I wish he could have got the old, gray house, the cattle browsing in the lot, the rugged lines of grandmother's face and figure as she sat in the old rocking chair on the puncheon floor of the little stoop and watched us

playing "black man" and "puss wants a corner." I am sure some wonderful figures would have been added to the world of art, for we children must, with our untrammelled limbs and wild, flaxen curls, have typified young life at its best, and the faces of our elders as they lent themselves to our happiness and joy would have made a study in their sweet relaxation from toil and worry. What would he have called the picture — "Peasants Playing"? Maybe so, though Indiana farmers might resent the title, and grandmother, nodding on the stoop, was doubtless dreaming of the old days in Albemarle when she danced with young grandees of the realm and knew nothing of the hard work and privation that came to her in a pioneer country.

When it comes to pure joy in being alive there is no social distinction, and when an artist paints happiness or woe he depicts something which is no respecter of persons.

One of the great blessings of having a child around the house is his capability for bringing to us this intrinsic quality of joy in being. This is absolute where nearly every other thing is relative.

Instead of setting out very early to teach a child the fallacies of his belief in life, we should try with might and main to allow him to teach us the fallacy of our disbelief. We should allow him to transmute for us our leaden metal into gold. If the child can construct a happy world out of the shabby old chairs in the sitting-room shall we be fools enough to refuse to live in it? Shall we tell him to "keep still" when he shouts and laughs and thus shut out from our own ears the myriad sounds of Nature crystallised into human articulation?

When I think of the society people who, night after night, have shut the children up in the nursery and gone away to the theatre or to a stupid dinner or reception, or a cut and dried banquet (nothing in all the category of social woes is quite so bad as a banquet), I wonder if they have anything to remember which is quite so charming as the old fireside games we used to play at home or this twilight romp at grandmother's — classic little manifestation of human exuberance under the classic summer moon!

I am so afraid some people, who can't

enter society and are bitter over it, might forget that they can have a much better time at home evenings in romps and plays with the children. I am afraid they keep a gloomy silence, fagging away at some course of "improving" reading or even playing cards with the neighbours instead of playing "William Ma-trimimity" or "Club-fist" or "Old Grimes is dead" or "hunt the thimble" with the youngsters.

To be sure the children ought to go to bed early, but let them have some evening hours of play when the grown folks join in wholeheartedly or their lives will lack some of the sweetest memories allotted to poor mortals.

I will not begin telling stories about my grandson yet awhile, but I can scarcely wait for the time when he begins to see things as they are—heroes in hired men, a fiery charger in our old horse, raging cataracts in wayside streams, magnificent mud turtles, fine fish in puddles, jewels in the bridles of his uncle's work horses! And I mean to see everything just as he sees it, for beauty is in the eye of the beholder and mine shall be refitted with rainbow glasses for his especial benefit.



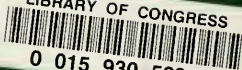


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